

***AGAINST
IMMEDIACY***
VIDEO ART
AND MEDIA
POPULISM

William Kaizen

AGAINST
IMMEDIACY

INTERFACES STUDIES IN VISUAL CULTURE

*Editors Mark J. Williams, Dartmouth College,
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I dedicate this book to our children, Tal and Layla: May your future be even brighter than ours.

AGAINST
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INTRODUCTION

A lot of us who went into video at the beginning did so because we thought art shouldn't be made in limited editions and in video we finally had an eminently reproducible medium that could get into the hands of the many. It was a populist form, and our great hope was to do something that made it into Kim's Video store. You know? I didn't want to be collected.

I wanted to talk.

— Dara Birnbaum¹

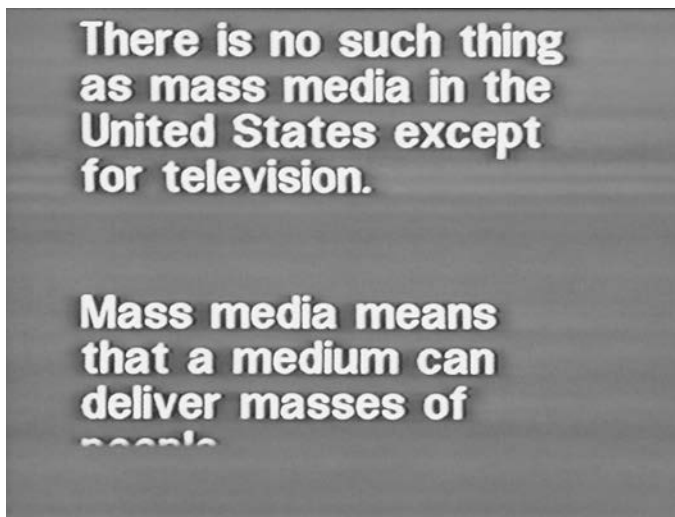
►► Years before pundits claimed that the Internet had brought about a revolution in digital democracy, works of early video art offered a populist vision of the mass media as its makers grappled with the impact of television on the public sphere and the changes in subjectivity wrought by electronic communication. Starting in the mid-1960s, visual artists began working with technologies and techniques adopted from the television industry in an attempt to transform viewers from passive receivers into active participants engaged in their own mass mediation. In happenings and installations, during broadcasts and on tape, these artists pushed viewers off their couches and encouraged them to engage with television in ways that differed from its everyday consumption. Early video art began circa 1965 in the context of multimedia happenings and continued for approximately a decade in the parallel and often intersecting work of artists who formed video collectives and those associated with postminimalism. By 1974 early experiments by artists who were using television were codified as “video art,” a museum-worthy medium well on its way to attaining the ubiquity it has today. Through a combination of avant-garde provocation and grassroots community building, their work called attention to how television frames public communication without imposing a reductive notion on the public of who “the people” are. It revealed the ways in which subjectivity circulated in electronic networks and questioned the limits that these networks were imposing on the public,

upholding “the people” as a community whose members would be interested in contemplating their own position in the emerging Information Age and taking the circulation of electronic communications into their own hands.

The change brought about by the artists who developed early video art was undertaken less as an act of iconoclasm than as one of radical revision and is best characterized as a “soft revolution.”² Rather than destroy either commercial television or the art gallery, these artists set out to recast institutions related to both in a different mold. They were the first generation raised when the everyday viewing of electronic moving images on television was becoming common in the United States, accompanied by the rise of surveillance on closed-circuit television. While they held different attitudes toward television, the possibilities the medium offered beyond one-to-many broadcasting and covert spying united them all. They came to television from outside the industry, as members of the audience demanding different ways of experiencing the world via the screen. They didn’t want to overthrow the television industry so much as find alternative uses for the medium. This meant making programs for broadcast with the same intentions as those applied to any work of visual art. It also meant using television to produce works shown in galleries, lofts, and other nontypical spaces as a means of producing contemplative, aesthetic experiences. If this work had radical tendencies, they lay in the quest to find more egalitarian uses for the mass media and their questioning of who “we, the people” were becoming in relation to the electronic networks that were encroaching ever further on everyday life.

At its most overtly political, early video art asked what it meant for “the people” to be construed as an audience that received images and sounds via one-way broadcasts that delivered them into the hands of advertisers and disenfranchised the public sphere. This was the subject of *Television Delivers People* by Richard Serra and Carlotta Faye Schoolman. First shown late one night in 1973 on a commercial television station in Amarillo, Texas, their video must have come as quite a shock to whoever was watching.³ Serra and Schoolman appropriated sections of various academic papers on television, culling citations whose imperative voices recounted the various ways in which commercial television was purportedly subjugating the public. They set these texts in contrasting yellow against a bright blue background and sent them scrolling across the screen from the bottom up in a carefully timed sequence.

Accompanied by the cheery sound of Muzak, which resonates dissonantly with the gravitas of the words on display, *Television Delivers People* begins:



Richard Serra, *Television Delivers People* (1973)

“The product of television, commercial television, is the audience. Television delivers people to an advertiser. There is no such thing as mass media in the United States except for television. Mass media means that a medium can deliver masses of people. Commercial television delivers 20 million people a minute.” For the next five minutes the piece builds in tenor as it continues to critique the increasing domination of the world by privately owned media networks. Referring to the “media control” wielded by the “new media state,” it identifies commercial television as the primary vehicle for foisting consumer culture on the public by the oligarchy controlling the airwaves. For Serra and Schoolman there would seem to be no hope for television as a medium that could represent less capitalist mobilizations of the people. Instead, their video evokes an atomized populace, reduced to monetizable ratings and duped into spending its leisure time as a pawn of advertisers and station owners.

In place of the typical network sign-off, which at the time usually conjured an uplifting image of the people in the form of a U.S. flag waving to the sound of *The Star Spangled Banner*, Serra and Schoolman were asking their audience to consider whether or not television could deliver people to more publicly minded and democratic forms of mass communication. Although theirs was an overt attack on the current state of the mass media, between the lines they

were not only asking the audience if the people could be constituted differently in relation to the mass media, but demonstrating how.

Given *Television Delivers People*'s strident criticism of the medium's connection to commerce, it's remarkable (and exceptional) that it was shown on a commercial channel.⁴ But despite its gloomy tone, when taken whole, it produced exactly the kind of oppositional voice that its content seemed to deem impossible. It rerouted the mass distribution that broadcasting affords by welling up from within commercial television in opposition to the usual network fare. The alienation effects it used—including the collision between the soundtrack and the image, and the focus on television as a space for reading as opposed to watching—turned the piece into something completely unlike the typical television program or advertisement of the day. By forgoing imagery, Serra and Schoolman transformed a primarily iconic medium into a symbolic one, converting distracted television watching into an act of textual contemplation. In so doing, they increased the audience's understanding, by comparison, of how television usually delivers people into the hands of an advertiser on an endless flow of hypnagogic pictures. By stopping the flow of images, they broke with television's lulling effect, which the Muzak's ironic counterpoint only heightened. Airing their work as the station sign-off, Serra and Schoolman had the last word for the night. Instead of sending viewers to sleep with patriotic clichés, *Television Delivers People* offered a jolt of critical analysis before bed. It suggested to viewers that television might yet be capable of delivering the people somewhere beyond the constraints of the new media state.

Works such as *Television Delivers People* remain relevant because they offer examples of democratic media populism that continue to inspire artists and activists.⁵ Social art practices with expressly political intent are the norm in contemporary art, as is the use of mass mediums. When video art emerged, its makers were challenging not only the long-standing rejection in modern American art of direct political engagement, but also the use of techniques and technologies derived from the mass media. The artists who developed early video art conducted a series of experiments using art galleries, lofts, the streets, and even broadcast television itself as sites where the immediacy of vision-at-a-distance that electronic imaging offered could be used to generate experiences at odds with everyday media consumption. When the artists who made early video art turned away from traditional visual art mediums and toward ones more closely related to the electronic mass media, a number

did so with explicitly political intent, creating models of how a medium like television might better function for the public good. By 1960 television had risen to prominence in the United States as a medium that was both popular and at least superficially populist. It was a platform designed to entertain the masses while keeping them politically informed, a task it performed admirably in many ways. But as critics often noted, its programming was all too often skewed to the lowest common denominator, and it offered a sense of participation in public life in a form designed for consumption in private homes and whose direct public impact was difficult to assess. A number of artists attempted to transform television into a small-scale, more truly populist medium during video art's first decade. They worked largely outside the commercial television industry, and even those who occasionally worked inside it, as Serra and Schoolman did, were opposed to the control from above that industry gatekeepers asserted over the medium.

Umberto Eco coined the term “media populism” in a discussion of right-wing attempts to mobilize the people through the mass media. Eco, like many recent commentators, associates contemporary populism with politics that operate against democracy. Taking Silvio Berlusconi to task for his demagoguery, Eco defines media populism as “appealing to people directly through media.”⁶ In a bid to consolidate their own sovereignty, demagogues appeal to the will of the people from above, with no intention of giving the public a direct voice in governance or public life. For Eco, the people, particularly as represented in the mass media, exist in purely negative terms. He writes, “The ‘people’—understood as an expression of a sole will and identical sentiments, a quasi-natural force that embodied morality and history—do not exist.”⁷ Ernesto Laclau agrees with Eco, but accepts the people’s nebulous existence. Finding positive value in this nonspecific existence, he argues that members of the public can work from below just as demagogues can work from above by adopting the name of the people in their own attempts to bring about social change. Laclau writes, “The political operation *par excellence* is always going to be the construction of a ‘people.’”⁸ For Laclau, “the people” is a linguistic placeholder that has emerged since the birth of modern democracy in order to provide an opening for political change on behalf of various political interests, whether from above or below.

In Laclau’s formulation, populism depends on the public articulation of demands for social change. He writes of this process “1) that these demands are formulated to the system by an underdog of sorts—that there’s

an equalitarian dimension implicit in them; 2) that their very emergence presupposes some kind of exclusion or deprivation.”⁹ Works of early video art not only demanded but demonstrated that more equitable uses could be found for television beyond the commercial television industry. At odds with the pseudo-populism that characterized the cynical cliché espoused by network television executives—that “the public interest is what interests the public”—early video art presented experiences designed to better incorporate viewers’ own interests, investments, and points of view and was often stridently critical of the limits imposed by television’s existing structures.¹⁰ The artists who helped develop early video art worked on the margins of the professional television industry. They demanded both change from the industry’s overseers and critical reflection from the audience regarding the ways industry used television to shape the people.

The populism found in early video art grew from its makers’ sympathy with the New Left. The grassroots, left-wing populism characterizing the New Left’s drive to create a stronger sense of participatory democracy carried over to the attitudes of media reformers. During the 1960s, organizations such as Students for a Democratic Society, the Yippies, and even public officials inside the Federal Communications Commission were calling for the people to have more say in mass mediums such as television. Their focus was less demagoguery than the control being imposed on the flow of electronic information from above and the freeing of network power. Working alongside other media activists, the artists who made early video art operated against the demographic media populism grounded in commerce that reduced programming to readily consumed clichés and the people to the status of ratings. While these artists occasionally took figures such as President Richard Nixon to task, they more often challenged the watered-down pluralism found in the mainstream mass media in the United States, whose producers claimed to offer balanced coverage while heavily restricting not only the subjects they covered but also the ways in which they covered them.

The media populism imbuing early video art moved in two divergent but complementary directions. The first was the idea that public viewers should have the power to produce, distribute, and consume their own media works. Proponents of this position argued that people should have the right to control their own mediated self-representation, for whatever ends, an attitude that led to the drive to make television a more participatory medium and to the construction of alternative mass media networks. The second idea was

that the people should have the right to use television as a self-reflexively critical medium that could question the limits of the identities it promulgated and the hegemonic forms it had assumed as an institution. Proponents of this position critically attacked existing networks of mass mediation by calling attention to the ways in which commercial television conjures a people only to reduce them, through ratings or otherwise, to various instrumental concerns. Whether demanding that the people have the right to media self-determination or critiquing the existing limits of the current system or doing both simultaneously, early video art pointed toward the limits that television placed on the construction of a people while offering experiences in which the public would have more say in these constructions.

Across numerous intersecting stories, each chapter of this book recounts how artists used television as a means of grappling with one of three related issues: participation and the mass media, building alternative media networks, and media ecology. Tying these issues together was the belief that artworks could be a means for holding a mirror up to the conventions of the mass media and changing its limits for social good. The prelude sets the stage, beginning at the end of early video art's history, at the Open Circuits conference held in 1974 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The most tendentious issues related to the use of television as a medium in the visual arts were debated there by some of video art's leading critics and practitioners. Chapter 1 returns to the beginning of video art's history, focusing on its emergence from the multimedia happenings scene of the mid-1960s and its makers' attempts to foster greater audience participation in the mass media. It covers the reception of the writing of Marshall McLuhan in the art world and the work of artists such as the members of usco, Andy Warhol, Nam June Paik, Ken Dewey, and Stan VanDerBeek. Chapter 2 addresses the video collectives founded by the next generation of artists, who worked to give greater voice to people whose stories weren't being covered by mainstream media. It recounts the various ways that these collectives, including the Raindance Foundation, the Videofreex, the People's Video Theatre, the Women's Video News Service, and tvrtv, created alternative networks of production, distribution, and consumption on the margins of the television industry. The theme of chapter 3 is the ecology of the mass media and how artists who emerged in the context of both the video collectives and post-minimalism built closed-circuit installations that critiqued the changes in subjectivity wrought by electronic technology. It discusses the work of artists

Les Levine, Frank Gillette, Juan Downey, Vito Acconci, and Dan Graham and their interest in the writings and ideas of Neil Postman, Gregory Bateson, and Margaret Mead. The coda moves from 1974 to 2001, when video art became ubiquitous in the art world and was canonized as the most significant new artistic medium to emerge since photography.

This book concentrates on primary sources in order to connect early video art to the media politics in which it was originally situated. While critics and scholars have paid significant attention to video art since its inception, they have frequently slighted its political commitments. None of the major histories of the political and social impact of television in the United States mention video art, and art historians have often overlooked video art's political engagements in favor of its formal qualities.¹¹ A spate of recent books has begun reassessing the history of the moving image as used in the visual art world. Several of these, including Yvonne Spielmann's *Video: The Self-Reflexive Medium* and David Joselit's *Feedback: Television against Democracy*, focus on early video art. In her discussion, Spielmann continues to separate what she characterizes as overtly political artworks from other, more aesthetically minded work. She offers less than a page of analysis of "guerrilla television," in contrast to considerably longer discussions of what she calls "artistic video," disregarding both the reflexive aesthetics of the former and the political reflections of the latter.¹² Joselit laudably makes no such distinctions in *Feedback*. Reflecting on the politics of video art and its ties to the New Left, he provocatively links early video art to numerous other groups and figures outside the art world, including the Diggers, the Yippies, the Black Panthers, Melvin Van Peebles, Timothy Leary, and Lucille Ball. In wide-ranging analyses, he spends as much time outside the art world as inside, which lends his book a breadth absent from other accounts. The history presented here complements his by more closely examining the context of the art world and how artists used television during the 1960s and early 1970s. It draws on new interviews conducted by the author as well as previously unrecognized primary sources. Rather than apply contemporary theory to the past, this book maps networks of influence and reception in order to chart a history of early video art through the ideas that were current among artists when it was made.

One conclusion that remains relevant to the issue of early video art's political commitments is that in order for democratic media populism to thrive, electronic networks must allow for metacommunication on their formal and

structural limits by offering the possibility of significant self-reflection in the midst of their endless circulation of information. The title of this book is a nod to Susan Sontag's essay "Against Interpretation," in which she argues that art criticism should concentrate on the poetics of form over the allegorical interpretation of content.¹³ While Sontag is clear regarding her opposition to the hunt for meaning beneath the surface of a story, my use of "against" is more ambivalent. In the context of early video art, working against the immediacy of the mass media meant creating new forms of circulation as a complement to, as well as a critique of, electronic instantaneity. It meant working both "up against" the speed at which a medium like television circulates information and "in opposition" to its capabilities by harnessing its speed for different ends. "Against" also harbors a third meaning: "to be in competition with." If these artists were competing with the mainstream mass media, they did so by offering contemplative experiences at odds with the distracted speed that already imbued the electronic public sphere circa 1970. Today, their work continues to suggest that being against immediacy in a considered way, whether as artist or audience, requires time apart from the clamor of everyday electronic mediation as well as semiautonomous zones where opposition can be staged and alternatives tested. This is often forgotten in displays of contemporary video art, where room after darkened room numbingly batters the viewer's senses as readily as commercial television broadcasting ever did and where visitors to galleries and museums spend as much time conferring with their personal electronic devices as they do experiencing works of art. This sentiment is well worth recovering in our hypermediated age of unremitting distraction, where information moves ever quicker, further diminishing opportunities for contemplation away from the drone of commercial electronic networks.

PRELUDE *OPEN CIRCUITS*

▶▶ No event better encapsulates the budding relationship between visual art and television than the Open Circuits conference held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1974, which was the first time so many people interested in television had gathered in such an illustrious museum. Subtitled “An International Conference on the Future of Television,” the three-day event brought together artists, critics, and curators from around the world to discuss the merits of television as an artistic medium and the ways artists had begun using it in their work.¹ Open Circuits came at the end of a decade of experimentation when visual artists who might otherwise have been working in traditional mediums had turned to mass mediums, including television. A decade earlier, at the outset of such experimentation, the artist Nam June Paik presciently declared, “The cathode ray tube will replace the canvas.”² When Paik held his first exhibition, he was one of a handful of visual artists experimenting outside the commercial television industry with the plastic and social possibilities that the medium offered. By 1974, thanks to proselytizers such as Paik, as well as increased access to the means of production, many artists had come to embrace technologies and techniques derived from television. Just before the conference, Gregory Battcock wrote, “The quantity of video material presented in galleries, museums, artists’ lofts and university workshops during the past year or so is truly amazing. It is no exaggeration to say that today video is the fastest growing field for artistic exploration. Quite literally, everybody is interested in it and practically everybody is working within some aspect of video.”³ The participants at Open Circuits confirmed that in one way or another television, recast as “video,” was the future of art, and they were right, as is evident from the ubiquity of video art today. Despite their differences, they agreed that television had become the most important new medium adopted by the art world since photography. Given its reputation as a vast wasteland incompatible with the fine arts, this was a surprising but not wholly unexpected development.

As Battcock's comments indicate, "video," in the guise of video art, was the vehicle through which television entered the museum. In the early days of the television industry, "video" referred to the image portion of a television transmission, in contrast to the "audio" portion. In the art world, "video" referred to the various uses artists were finding for television conceived of most broadly as the experience of vision-at-a-distance engendered by cathode ray tubes, coaxial cables, and radio waves, often coupled with magnetic tape recording. Circa 1974 the appellation "video art" began to coalesce around these uses. Video art became the official name for a hybrid medium that crossed television with painting and sculpture in a form that was quickly becoming an institutionally sanctioned artistic practice and fine art commodity. At Open Circuits, the critic Paul Stitelman said of the new medium's rising fortunes, "It would appear that video has arrived as an art. The very presence of the [conference] at an institution as staid as the Museum of Modern Art indicates as much."⁴ Over the previous several years, national and international support for video art had been rising. Numerous art galleries were exhibiting video art. Cable and public television stations had been giving artists access to equipment and airing their work. Government and private foundation funding had become available. Special issues of art magazines had appeared regularly. The journal *Radical Software*, dedicated wholly to the subject, had run its course. Art schools were offering classes on video art. Following the conference, MoMA began an ongoing video art exhibition program and started collecting it, and other major art institutions began showing similar support. At the exhibition *Art Now '74*, held in Washington, DC, in a bid to found an American counterpoint to the long-standing European art festivals such as the Venice Biennale and Documenta, nearly half the pieces shown were video art.⁵ In Germany, the major exhibition *Projekt '74* featured more than forty video artists from the United States. The catalog described video art as one of the "turning points in the development of art since the 1960s" and one of the most important "new paths and aims of the 1970s."⁶ On the West Coast, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art held an exhibition called *Collector's Video* celebrating video art's rising economic value. The exhibition's curator heralded video as a means for collectors to work around both the economic scarcity of older forms of handmade art and the tightening of financial belts driven by the oil crisis.⁷ At the same time, the nearby Long Beach Museum was beginning to amass one of the most substantial collections of video art in the world. By 1974

video art had reached maturity. It had a broad range of practitioners making and exhibiting significant works, the beginnings of commercial sales, and a set of associated theoretical issues that were being hotly discussed, which Open Circuits helped crystallize.

Open Circuits was originally planned as an addendum to an even more ambitious exhibition celebrating the rise of television inside and outside the art world. When the organizers failed to raise enough money, the conference was the only part of the original plan to come to fruition.⁸ Nevertheless, MoMA's imprimatur helped certify that video art had become museum-worthy. Paik coined the phrase "open circuits," encapsulating the idea of a readily accessible, free, transnational mass media where television would be used to generate new kinds of aesthetic experiences. At the conference, Paik screened *Global Groove* (1973), his vision of what art in the future might look like when aired on such an open circuit. In opposition to the pre-MTV music promo films that had long been in existence, *Global Groove* was anticommercial and avant-garde. It featured diverse musical and dance performances that switched from rock and roll to John Cage to Korean and Navajo folk traditions, all similarly transmogrified through an acidly colored, shape-shifting array of synthesized special effects. Other artists who participated at the conference included Stan VanDerBeek, Frank Gillette, Joan Jonas, Vito Acconci, and Richard Serra from the United States; Michael Snow from Canada; Shigeko Kubota and Toshio Matsumoto from Japan; and Pierre Schaeffer, Nicolas Schöffer, and Jose Montes-Baquer from Europe. Papers were presented by an equally international roster that included Battcock, John McHale, Wulf Herzogenrath, Jorge Glusberg, and René Berger. The conference began with a panel on the international contexts in which video art was emerging in relation to different national television industries. Other panels addressed the differences between film and video as artistic mediums, and the place of the viewer in relation to the screen. According to accounts, debates that took place in the crowded conference room were "heated," even "cantankerous."⁹ Although the organizers considered the conference a success, they wrote afterward, "The result was anything but smooth and soothing. Open Circuits was a provocation, not a pacifier."¹⁰ Speakers argued over how technologies and experiences related to television might effectively connect with those related to the fine arts, and not everyone was sanguine about the crossing of art and television. The intensity of the discussions indicates the seriousness with which the art world was approaching video art.



Nam June Paik, *Global Groove* (1973)

The legitimacy of video art and the marriage of art and technology were among the key issues debated at Open Circuits. Artists had been associating the fine art and electronic technologies throughout the twentieth century, although not without contestation. At the conference, the critic Robert Pincus-Witten openly dismissed “tech-art” in general and video art as its latest incarnation.¹¹ Although sympathetic to the makers of video art, Pincus-Witten was skeptical of claims that artistic practices using new technologies such as television had any special power to change the future of the arts for the better, as some at the conference were claiming. He singled out Douglas Davis, who was one of the conference’s organizers, and his book *Art and the Future* for criticism. When Davis published the book the year before, it was the first comprehensive history of art and technology. Davis positioned video art in relation to earlier work by artists such as Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, El Lissitzky, Naum Gabo, and Nicholas Schöffer (whose paper at was presented Open Circuits on audiotape), all of whom championed the use of new technologies in the context of the fine arts, often in utopian terms.¹² Pincus-Witten discounted such work because of its makers’ undue faith that technology would necessarily bring about better aesthetic experiences while

the very technologies they used to generate it were continually becoming obsolete. For a skeptic like Pincus-Witten, new technologies impoverished art as readily as they improved it.

While Davis was certainly utopian—he subtitled his book *A History/Prophecy of the Collaboration between Science, Technology and Art*—his study remains valuable because it was one of the first to recognize the connections between earlier, European artistic experiments with new technology and the American art of the 1960s and 1970s. Davis largely skips the decades following World War II when the art world in the United States favored more traditional media. American art achieved widespread recognition only during the 1950s when abstract expressionism began to receive worldwide acclaim. In his 1957 essay “The Liberating Quality of the Avant-Garde,” Meyer Schapiro captured the distinction between painting as a traditional fine-art medium and the mass media, which he dismissed as “the arts of communication.”¹³ Along with other critics of his generation, including Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, Schapiro championed abstract expressionism because of what he perceived to be its opposition to the technological excesses of the war and the rise of mass media. He contrasted the arts of communication to the fine arts in general and to modern painting in particular because he believed that abstract expressionism was one of the last bastions of complex, personal communication in a world that had become increasingly technologized. Against the mass media’s stultification and middlebrow values, the abstract expressionists, he wrote, were “ultimately opposed to communication as it is now understood.”¹⁴ Their art produced a “high degree of non-communication,” thereby jamming the codes of communicative efficiency.¹⁵ For Schapiro, abstract expressionist works bared a purer affect than did mere instrumental communication, one whose subtleties were excluded from the arts of communication except in the most clichéd ways. He likened the experience of beholding an abstract expressionist painting to a secularized spiritual experience. Rather than communication, the painting became an occasion for heightened “communion and contemplation,” not between an individual and God but between two people, with the artwork serving as intermediary.¹⁶ In maintaining painting as a traditional medium, he concluded, abstract expressionism offered a kind of salvation from industrial society because it had become the bearer of a more primal means of personal communion operating precisely against mass communication and the culture

industry. Schapiro measured the avant-garde's success by the distance artists put between themselves and the arts of communication.

Over the course of the 1960s, much of the American avant-garde had reversed course, and by the time of Open Circuits the opposite conditions pertained. Artists in movements as diverse as pop art, Fluxus, minimalism, and conceptual art embraced the mass media, turning from the humanist communion Schapiro found in abstract expressionism to the arts of communication. These artists parodied handicraft or abandoned it altogether as they dove into mass production and adopted mass mediums. The reasons for this are overdetermined, but one consequence of these developments was a shift in the role played by artists in the United States from atavistic craftspeople to avant-garde technophiles.¹⁷ Andy Warhol, who ironized both of these identities by continually moving between the two, said, "I suppose it's hard for intellectuals to think of [my work] as Art. I'm a mass communicator."¹⁸ Writing on video art circa 1970, critic John Margolies agreed, putting this more broadly: "The concept of the artist's role is undergoing a transformation; the artist is emerging as a communicator."¹⁹ Margolies's statement encapsulates the shift to a notion of the fine artist as a wide-ranging practitioner of many types of communication, particularly those associated with both the content and the form of mass production and the mass media.

In *Art and the Future*, Davis describes how artists began directly incorporating television into their work by rejecting the "predominant commercial networks" and their programming in favor of an "invasion of TV by art" dominated by strategies developed by the avant-garde.²⁰ For Davis, who also made video art, "The potential—and the challenge—of the medium seemed unlimited. The loosening of the old, monolithic TV structure created opportunities for individual expression and immediate communication with large audiences unimaginable before."²¹ Avant-garde artists could now easily reach the masses with their work—at least potentially. Marking important dates, Davis recounts how Paik, Wolf Vostell, and Tom Wesselman all began incorporating commercially available television sets into their work in 1963, harnessing the power of live broadcasting as a means of bringing moving images and changing sounds into the art gallery. In 1965 artists including Paik began working with portable videotape recording systems, allowing a broader range of televisual experiences to be incorporated into works of art. By 1971 art collectors were purchasing works of video art, and public televi-

sion stations were offering significant support for the production of artworks designed for broadcasting that were made in their professional production studios. Throughout the book, Davis provides a similarly thorough accounting of the interrelationship between twentieth-century art and technology. In his conclusion he makes saccadic leaps connecting the rise of electronic art to the end of human society as we know it. He argues that the linkage of art and electronic technologies points toward a posthuman future where “the end of man is apparently the future of art.”²² For skeptics, this type of futurological speculation was hyperbolic. Deflating such grandiose claims, John Baldessari summed up this position best when he said at the conference that videotape was “just one more tool in the artist’s tool box. Another tool to have around like a pencil.”²³ While television may have been as significant artistically as the invention of the pencil, seen through a more pragmatic lens it was simply another means to an end.

►► The problem of the medium was another topic that was widely discussed during the early days of video art, as it was at Open Circuits. If television-related technologies were no more or less than an electronic pencil, what could artists do differently with this new pencil than with other mediums such as painting, film, and commercial television? The framing of “video” as an artistic medium and not just the visual channel of a television broadcast was handed down from formalist art criticism. Clement Greenberg set the tone for these debates in the art world with his earlier assertion that modernist art was predicated on an artist’s self-reflexive use of a medium. His best-known formulation of this idea appeared in his essay “Modernist Painting”: “The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.”²⁴ To paraphrase his well-known argument, the engine that drove the emergence of the avant-garde in the nineteenth century across various disciplines was the turn inward, away from the spectacle of kitsch and toward the more seriousness undertaking of self-critique based on the immanent qualities of the medium itself. For the visual arts in general, this meant rejecting time-based effects. For painting specifically, it meant the exploration of what he called “flatness,” or all the physical qualities that make a painting a material object as opposed to a trompe l’oeil window opening onto a reproduced scene. Greenberg wrote that

the avant-garde succeeded because “each art had . . . determine[d], through its own operations and works, the effects exclusive to itself.” As a result, “it quickly emerged that the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique in the nature of its medium . . . [and] the limitations that constitute the medium.”²⁵ Greenberg dismissed new media and multimedia art not only because he thought they acceded to kitsch, but also because he saw them as being opposed to the atemporal nature of the visual arts. Following the long-standing tradition of the *paragone*, or the comparison between the arts, he opposed the visual arts, which resist time by taking place all at once, with the literary and theatrical arts, which take time to unfold. He was highly critical of the entrance into the galleries of time-based works, including happenings, installations, film, and video art. He claimed that avant-garde art excelled only when it self-reflexively examined the “limiting conditions” of the traditionally spatial mediums of painting and sculpture. He thought that the main issue confronting these artists was eliciting the limits of their chosen medium.

Greenberg’s writing cast a long shadow. Despite his dislike for the use of new media in art, commenters on video art frequently adopted his thinking. In his essay celebrating the rise of video art, Gregory Battcock wrote, “Most of the activity in video, and the critical attention it attracts, has one principal goal: the very identification of video as a communicative (i.e. artistic) medium.”²⁶ Many essays on video art by Douglas Davis, David Antin, and Rosalind Krauss through to the present framed the problem in these terms.²⁷ In Battcock’s essay as well as the paper he delivered at Open Circuits, he identified portability as the defining characteristic of television and of video art in particular, but he was in the minority with this position.²⁸ Instead, the term “immediacy,” or the focus on television’s ability to instantly produce synchronized images and sounds at distances small to vast, was ever present in discussions of both television and early video art. To adopt Greenberg’s logic, “immediacy” bubbles up through the historical record as the word best suited to define the medium of video art and its limits. The idea that the immediacy by which television delivers events is unsurpassed in the annals of communication existed long before video art. At one of the first public demonstrations of television in 1927, Herbert Hoover, then secretary of commerce, said over the airwaves, “Human genius has now destroyed the impediment of distance in a new respect, and in a manner hitherto unknown.”²⁹ The reporter who covered the event for the *New York Times* was

even more dramatic: “More than 200 miles of space intervening between the speaker [Hoover] and his audience was annihilated by the television apparatus.”³⁰ This sentiment would be repeated many times thereafter. One of the most enthusiastic accounts of television as a medium was found in Robert E. Lee’s *Television: The Revolution*, written in 1944. Lee compared television with previous mediums, focusing especially on the differences between television and film. Regarding newsreels, he commented, “[M]otion pictures make no claim to immediacy. Because of the length of time involved in preparing a film, it can be made current only as regards a broad trend. On the other hand, a telecast has an immediacy which makes it possible to link it with specific current events.”³¹ The author of a *Life* magazine article of 1948 concurred: “TV’s frequent crudity has charm, and it has an immediacy—an ‘it’s-happening-right-there-while-I’m-watching’ quality—that makes the whole world of entertainment, journalism and politics want to get into the act.”³² Long after the introduction of kinescopes and magnetic tape recording, television retained this sense of immediacy. While live television claimed an increasingly smaller portion of broadcast television by 1960, “liveness,” or the sense that what the viewer was seeing was live even if it was prerecorded, continued to define the viewing experience until the rise of digital media.³³

Because of its connection to television, immediacy was also put forward by many artists and critics as the defining characteristic of video art. In *The New Television*, Paik humorously wrote, “In my videotaped electrovision, not only do you see your picture instantaneously and find out what kinds of bad habits you have, but see yourself deformed in twelve ways, which only electronics can do.”³⁴ When asked why he began making video art, Bruce Nauman responded, “Well, initially, it was the immediacy of the medium.”³⁵ When Jud Yalkut raised the issue of the immediacy of video art in an interview, Paul Ryan said, “It seems live, and has an unstored quality—like the live immediacy of . . . the 7 o’clock news.”³⁶ Dan Graham commented, “Video is a present-time medium. . . . [It] feeds back indigenous data in the immediate, present-time environment.”³⁷ Vito Acconci said, “The immediacy of video was the most startling thing. The first video I made tried to make use of that—I could use video as a mirror.”³⁸ At Open Circuits a number of speakers discussed immediacy in relation to video art.³⁹ Davis titled his essay for the conference “Time! Time! Time! The Context of Immediacy.” In an earlier essay he wrote, “No other medium allows it [immediacy] to such an extent.”⁴⁰ At Open Circuits, he clarified this statement by claiming that what characterizes video art is its

ability to capture events live, in real time. The curator Wolf Herzogenrath, in his paper, “Notes on Video as an Artistic Medium,” also discusses immediacy and the “authenticity” it lends to video art, although he acknowledges that this authenticity is constructed. The filmmaker Hollis Frampton recounts the story of his first encounter with video equipment, joking that “[t]he gratification was so intense and immediate that I felt confused. I thought I might be turning into a barbarian—or maybe even a musician.”⁴¹ Not all of these comments describe the relationship between immediacy and video art in identical ways. Some address broadcasting, others closed-circuit installations, others the feeling of liveness that imbues even recorded images when shown on a television screen. But what links all of these claims is the idea that the speed of the image, in conjunction with synchronized sound, is the most significant limiting condition of video art because of its link to television.

And yet televisual immediacy settled uneasily in the context of the art world as many artists refuted the ideology of immediacy touted by the commercial television industry. Without rejecting televisual immediacy outright, artists frequently worked against it in the double sense of “in opposition to it” as well as “up against its limits.” In a move opposed to Greenberg’s formalism, these artists worked to make visible the ways television’s immediacy is always already mediated by technology and social convention. The most politicized works of early video art grappled with the paradox of mediated immediacy and its social consequences. These works made visible the ways in which mass-mediated immediacy acts as a control mechanism by showing how televisual immediacy divides as much as it connects people. There was a slogan that circulated during the days of early video art: “VT ≠ TV.” While “VT” was short for “videotape,” it can be read more broadly as the panoply of practices grouped under the heading of “video art” that were explicitly working against commercial TV. Nevertheless, it was only possible to tout “Video art doesn’t equal television” precisely because the two were so closely identified. The artists who directly and indirectly adopted this slogan harnessed the immediacy of television in order to both acknowledge and transform its existing limits.

The critic and poet David Antin perceptively noted the close but critical relationship between commercial television and early video art in his 1975 essay “Video: The Distinctive Feature of the Medium” (reprinted that same year as “Television: Video’s Frightful Parent”).⁴² Antin enumerates the ways in which early video artists destabilized televisual immediacy as its makers focused on

the ways it mediates communication. He argues that immediacy is a normative ideology hiding other, more politically fraught types of social relation and that artists were working against “the illusion of immediacy” maintained by broadcast television.⁴³ Artists challenged this illusion in numerous ways. They revealed the rigid segmentation of broadcast programming by fashioning new means of producing video images that allowed viewers to create their own flow, or by heightening flow to an ecstatic flood, or by forgoing editing altogether. They called for the transformation of the medium from a one-way to a two-way street, creating alternative networks of production, distribution, and consumption outside the mainstream television industry. They laid bare the ways the apparatus of television mediates subjectivity as it imposes itself between people, constructing environments that allow viewers to palpably feel the ways in which the medium acts as a mediator between self and other. Antin notes that not all works of early video art tackled these subjects or took on these forms, but many did, and many also addressed the illusion of immediacy found in uses of television other than broadcasting, especially closed-circuit surveillance. If the potential of the medium seemed unlimited to some commentators, these artists felt it necessary to address the limitations of how television had long been conceived. Given its socio-political thrust, they moved beyond Greenbergian formalism by asking, in different ways, how a medium like television limits communication, thereby delimiting what can be said and who has permission to speak in the newly emerging electronic public sphere. They were pointedly questioning who the people were when brought together as a viewing audience in communication networks that they thought weren’t nearly open enough.

►► In the chapters of this volume that follow, the first two issues debated at Open Circuits—the relationship between art and technology, and the medium of video art—form the background against which a third topic was more actively played out. The issue of the liberation of television was at the forefront of the politics of early video art and was addressed at Open Circuits in papers delivered by Hans Magnus Enzensberger and Vilém Flusser. Although neither had much knowledge of video art, their critique of the television industry fell on sympathetic ears. Most of the artists in the audience had long been engaged in projects that were similarly critical of the existing uses of television. Enzensberger was the leading proponent of New

Left politics at Open Circuits. Because he was a strong advocate of left-wing media populism, it's not surprising that his collection of essays, *The Consciousness Industry: On Literature, Politics and the Media*, was particularly well received by the conference's organizers.⁴⁴ In *The Consciousness Industry*, Enzensberger called for direct artistic and political engagement with existing systems of mass mediation. Challenging his technophobic allies on the left, he wrote, "The theory of repressive tolerance [has] become a vehicle for resignation. . . . Fear of handling shit is a luxury a sewer-man cannot necessarily afford. The electronic media do away with cleanliness; they are by their nature 'dirty.' This is part of their productive power."⁴⁵ He thought that however filthy the conduits of the consciousness industry might be, liberation could come only by operating from within, by rejecting outmoded forms of liberal humanism in favor of an ever more penetrating inquiry into the life of mass man. Because the mass media now touched all aspects of everyday life, he believed that rejecting it out of hand was simply not possible and denied what he called the "cultural archaism" of so many of his colleagues on the left.⁴⁶ For Enzensberger, the most effective radical media tactics were based on producing counter-models of consciousness from within the mass media by using its own tools against it.

Enzensberger offered one of the most direct calls for participatory media made during 1960s. Capturing the essence of democratic media populism, he writes in *The Consciousness Industry*:

Manipulation . . . means technical treatment of a given material with a particular goal in mind. When the technical intervention is of immediate social relevance, then manipulation is a political act. In the case of the media industry, that is by definition the case. Thus every use of the media presupposes manipulation. . . . The question is therefore not whether the media are manipulated, but who manipulates. A revolutionary plan should not require the manipulators to disappear; on the contrary, it must make everyone a manipulator.⁴⁷

Rejecting the argument that the media simply manipulates the public, he acknowledges that there is no communication without some kind of manipulation and sees all communicative acts, whether technologically mediated or not, as potentially political given their greater relevance. While the politics of the status quo might infuse the messages currently presented by the mass media, he sees no reason why a medium like television can't foster

oppositional messages and recognizes that there are no technical reasons the medium could not issue different messages or even be structured differently.

This is the topic of Flusser's paper for Open Circuits, "Two Approaches to the Phenomenon, Television." One approach, which Flusser dismisses, is using television as an updated form of cinema. For Flusser, cinema is an extension of painting, a thing to be looked at, while television is like a window, a thing to be looked through. Flusser upholds the idea of television's immediacy, arguing that the medium is closer to the perception of actual events than the reproduction of events found in a painting or film and that it improves on the window inasmuch as it can present far more diverse virtual images and sounds of events than an actual window. Extending his architectural metaphor, Flusser ties the immediacy of the window to the egress offered by the door. As he describes it, if a window connects viewers to events, opening the door and walking outside commits them to doing something about them, but commercial television robs viewers of their commitment. It acts as a kind of "cinema in private" that allows viewers to "lead a life of consumption—of messages and the goods those messages propagate. The result of such a use of TV [i]s the tendency toward a totalitarian society in which man becomes a lonely tool manipulated by those who hold the power of decision."⁴⁸ Flusser proposes an alternative approach, in which viewers would use television as a means of connecting with one another and committing themselves to engaging directly with events, which would mean walking out the door and into the world. It would also mean reclaiming the tools of production and becoming manipulators of the mass media. According to Flusser, "Viewers must learn that they stand outside the program they are receiving, that they can rearrange it, introduce themselves into it and control the flux of events both in velocity and direction."⁴⁹ The effects of this recognition would have dramatic consequences for both art and politics. Agreeing with Enzensberger, Flusser continues, "If such change of attitude should occur . . . video . . . itself would be different from what it is now. It would have been made with a view to manipulation by the viewer. One of the aesthetic functions of future television will be not so much to provide aesthetic experience as to provide the means to criticize it and interfere in its process. Art would be something different from what it is in our present situation. And so, of course would . . . politics."⁵⁰ Flusser imagines that in the future television might become a vehicle for an art grounded in a "dialogical and discursive [*sic*] . . . universal politicization."⁵¹ He proposes that the tools

of the mass media might someday be in the hands of the people, who will use them for self-reflexive critique and for remaining open to otherness, although he also recognizes how hard it will likely be to change such an entrenched institution as television.

In Enzensberger's paper at Open Circuits, "Television and the Politics of Liberation," he looks back with skeptical hindsight on what happened when media reformers in West Germany attempted to become just such politicized media manipulators. Enzensberger contrasts the politics of liberation upheld by reformers with the politics of control that television was currently asserting, even in Germany, where the people ostensibly owned the networks. Contrary to those who argued that there was some monolithic force at work behind the mass media in Europe or the United States, he claims that control was asserted through pluralism and the seeming diversity of opinions presented in mass mediums such as television. Television in particular, he says, "involves people in political controversy while excluding them effectively from having any real say in it."⁵² In so doing, it acts as "a sort of homeostatic machine expressing, and at the same time containing, the contradictions which arise within the ruling class. . . . Television thus works as a servo-mechanism increasing the overall stability of a given social system."⁵³ This is even truer of the subconscious effects of entertainment programming than of direct political programming. He writes, "The much larger mass [of programming] carries latent political messages expressed in a great variety of cultural codes, messages which invade the viewer's mind at every level of consciousness," and also notes that television can act as a force of direct coercion when used in military applications or for surveillance.⁵⁴ In all of these cases, the public has little or no access to the means of production or distribution. The aim of leftist media reformers is therefore to give people increased access.

Enzensberger contrasts the homeostatic use of television and the politics of control with the politics of liberation. In *The Consciousness Industry* he lays out the criteria for a liberated mass media: "decentralized programming; each receiver a potential transmitter; mobilization of the masses; interaction of those involved; feedback; a political learning process; collective production; social control by self-organization."⁵⁵ While he repeats these sentiments in his paper at Open Circuits, underlining them as the central tenets of the politics of media liberation, he also describes what actually happened to media reformers in West Germany, where the liberal government instantly quashed

attempts to construct alternative television networks. On the other hand, the West German television industry was more open than the U.S. industry and reformers who went to work for the networks there and made positive contributions. Nevertheless, they “had a very limited direct effect,” and German television essentially remained a one-way street.⁵⁶ He also praises the “fascinating results” of artists’ use of television “as a vehicle for formal innovation” but notes that this work often falls back on art world conventions of avant-garde aesthetic innovation with few political consequences.⁵⁷ He says that it amounts to an artisanal form of television undertaken in opposition to the medium’s industrial uses in broadcasting and surveillance.⁵⁸ Writing about the ambivalent success of television revolutionaries in Europe, he ends his Open Circuits paper, “Altogether, it is impossible to arrive at sweeping conclusions. The politics of liberation have succeeded; the politics of liberation have failed. Both of these propositions could be defended, and both would ultimately appear meaningless.”⁵⁹ Looking forward, he sees the avant-garde as the last faint hope of an enclave open enough to resist the politics of control. Because he recognizes that video art may well be used to prop up existing institutions rather than critique them, he’s uncertain about the latter possibility, though he admits that he knows very little about video art in the United States.

Looking back, it’s possible to recognize that U.S. video art had long been a bastion of the populist media politics that both Flusser and Enzensberger endorsed. In conjunction with its formal innovation, many works were made during the 1960s and early 1970s that attempted to give the people the power of self-mediation using the tools and techniques of television as a means of critiquing mass mediation rather than upholding the ideology of immediacy. During the early days of video art, the line between the artistic and political avant-gardes was blurred. Artists better known today for their formal audacity made work that was often implicitly and even explicitly political, and artists better known today for their overt politics partook in groundbreaking formal experimentation. Its makers combined these two impulses in order to allow televisual experience to unite new aesthetic and political ends. With one foot in the avant-garde, the artists who made early video art firmly planted their other foot in the muck of the consciousness industry. They were committed to working against immediacy by helping the people, whoever they might be, understand the limits of the increasingly prevalent networks of electronic media whose importance could no longer be dismissed, even in the U.S. art world.

CHAPTER ONE **PARTICIPATION TELEVISION**

►► At his first exhibition in 1963, Nam June Paik presented an art-work titled *Participation tv* that allowed viewers to generate on-screen images by speaking into a microphone wired to a TV set. Paik reused the name several times, and it applies more broadly to the aspirations of a group of like-minded artists, including the members of *USCO*, Andy Warhol, Ken Dewey, and Stan VanDerBeek. In the mid-1960s, these artists began exploring the kinds of experience that technologies and techniques related to television could generate. They agreed that television was a medium with profound social consequences and that it had considerable potential for public good, but they also recognized its negative social effects. Working in dialogue with other media reformers, they wanted to find new uses for television that would enable viewers to more deeply engage with what they were watching by becoming more attentive consumers and even producers of televisual images. They challenged the conventions of everyday media consumption by crossing television with abstract painting and sculpture, underground filmmaking, and experimental theater, and showed these works in nondomestic social spaces where viewers could participate in a wider range of bodily and affective responses than everyday television viewing typically allowed. Against the idea that the people were a passive mass receiving whatever programming the networks aired, they constructed alternative forms of audience participation as a means of critically distancing people from their sets at home. They literally and metaphorically invited viewers to get off their couch, walk out the door, and experience television as a vehicle for producing a more creatively and politically absorbed people contributing to a healthier public sphere.

Discussions of participation that have circulated widely with reference to both contemporary art and new media are tied to the legacy of early video art.¹ In both critical writing and artworks made during the middle to late 1960s, artists were exploring the relationship between the mass media and audience participation in various ways. While these artists agreed with

those who claimed that television fostered passivity, they were also familiar with Marshall McLuhan's writing on television as a participatory medium and forged a middle position between the two. Whereas McLuhan thought that television was inherently participatory, they thought that it had failed to live up to its potential and wanted to liberate it from its commercial uses by creating new forms of social communion that would ultimately mitigate social alienation. Despite their avant-garde leanings, they hoped to transform television into a dynamically populist medium instead of one that was simply popular, and they attempted to produce more egalitarian forms of participation than those found on commercial television.

Outside the art world, when television was ascendant in the 1940s and 1950s, sociologists often inveighed against what they perceived to be the negative effects of mass communication and mass culture. Passivity was often singled out as a problem of grave importance. Irving Howe wrote that "mass culture reinforces those emotional attitudes that seem inseparable from existence in modern society: passivity and boredom."² Paul Lazarfeld and Robert Merton described the "narcotizing dysfunction" that the mass media fosters, "inadvertently transforming the energies of men from active participation into passive knowledge."³ Television was singled out as a primary culprit in engendering passivity as opposed to participation. Perhaps the most scathing account of television's negative social effects appeared in Gunther Anders's essay "The Phantom World of Television," published in English translation in *Dissent* in 1956. Anders excoriates the medium for its effects on everyday life, describing television viewers as a mass of isolated consumers unknowingly working on behalf of advertisers because the process of consumption begins at home in what is supposed to be leisure time. He rails against the destruction of the lively dialogue of the family dinner table, arguing that television is a "negative family table" because it speaks in the viewer's place, divesting viewers of the need, or even the ability, to talk back to the people on-screen or even to each other.⁴ More significantly, he writes, when we watch television, "events come to us, not we to them. . . . Because the world is brought into our homes we do not have to explore it. When the world comes to us, instead of our going to it, we are no longer in the world, but only listless, passive consumers of the world."⁵ The mass media in general and commercial television in particular were repeatedly accused of promoting passivity and denying the public the ability to make the kinds of critically informed decisions necessary for participation in a democratic society. The reduction of the public to

atomized consumers who spent their leisure time ensconced in the privacy of their homes was seen by Anders and many others as highly detrimental to the formation of a mature and cohesive public sphere.

For Anders and other critics, what commercial television offered was a far cry from the kinds of aesthetic communion expected from works of visual art whose aura it was necessary to behold in person, as described by Meyer Schapiro. Breaking with critical orthodoxy, McLuhan and Gilbert Seldes were two of the earliest authors to positively address the mass media in general and television in particular, and many of their ideas directly and indirectly contributed to early video art. Since the 1920s, Seldes had championed art forms that others dismissed as kitsch, including the various arts of communication. Although Seldes considered “low” art forms such as jazz and comic books potentially as important as the fine arts, he was certainly capable of criticizing them. He was particularly critical of mediums like radio and television that depended on broadcasting. He recognized that the mass media in the United States tended to cater to the lowest common denominator because it leaned toward the interests of advertisers rather the public. This had led, he wrote, to a widespread acceptance of a “teenage standard” whose ethos was: “Nothing in our daily lives must interfere with our having a good time.”⁶ He worked directly to develop programming that would counter this standard. After he was hired by CBS in the 1930s as director of television programming, one of his first broadcasts was a series of conversations between himself and Buckminster Fuller on the social impact of new technologies like television. Although largely unseen beyond a handful of CBS executives, these conversations were significant for Fuller’s later work and his sympathy for video art because they introduced him to the power of a medium with potentially global reach.⁷

In 1941 Seldes collaborated with the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York to create a series of programs designed to bring great works of visual art into people’s living rooms. Beginning with an introductory episode titled “The Metropolitan Museum Comes to You,” the series included shows that were guided by experts in the field and moved through the museum’s various collections. Later in the series, works were shown for extended periods in an experimental fashion, “with a musical background and minimum of identifying comment.”⁸ This offered contemplative viewers time for aesthetic communion with great works of art while offering distracted viewers a kind of video wallpaper to keep on in the background. Both of these ideas would

later become tropes in early video art. Over the course of the 1950s, other museums, like New York's Museum of Modern Art and Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, developed similar programs that also attempted to elevate the taste of the public with an injection of fine art into their homes. Seldes said, "We can transmit the created work so faithfully as to make the spectator feel the presence of the mysterious process that no one can define—the basic creative impulse itself."⁹ For Seldes, television transmission could bear the kinds of artistic affect that critics such as Schapiro said it denied.

In his essay "The Public Arts," Seldes writes that the purpose of fine art is to give meaning to life and he saw this possibility in mass mediums as well. Seldes said that, unlike traditional fine art, the popular arts ultimately "belong to the people," even in their mass-mediated forms, at least potentially.¹⁰ He criticized the mass media for betraying its debt to the public: "As long as the means of communication are not available for criticism of themselves, as long as we are prevented from thinking about the process by which we are hypnotized into not thinking, we remain at the mercy of our simplest appetites, our immediate and almost childlike sensations, and these can be exploited—for the arts most useful to the public are essentially those which can be most effectively turned against the public good."¹¹ To better the quality of public arts like television, Seldes argued that it was necessary to move beyond the passivity fostered by the mass media's childlike immediacy by opening these arts to self-criticism and returning their interests to the public. For Seldes, mass mediums such as television could properly function as part of the fourth estate only if, instead of criticizing others or ignoring criticism altogether, they themselves remained open to criticism from within and without.

Seldes's work directly influenced McLuhan, who looked upon television even more favorably.¹² McLuhan famously opposed those like Anders who claimed that television induced passivity, arguing that television was engendering a new society heralded by an increased sense of communitarian participation. In his epochal book, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, published in 1964, McLuhan refuses to denounce television as mindless drivel because its content, or messages, are so clichéd. Instead he writes, "The tv image demands participation and involvement in depth of the whole being."¹³ For McLuhan, television's form trumps any particular messages it might send. In *Understanding Media* he uses the phrase "corporate participation" to describe both the bodily and social affect by which television connects with viewers, thereby uniting them into a people.¹⁴ He argues that

televisual immediacy upholds precisely the kinds of interpersonal communion that critics claimed the mass media had banished, and links it to broader changes in Western society. For McLuhan, the rise of the electronic mass media has led to the dawning of a new, more broadly participatory age. He writes, "We live today in the Age of Information and Communication, because electric media instantly and constantly creates a total field of interacting events in which all men participate."¹⁵ He takes television as the signal achievement of this age and sets out to describe its positive social value. In contrast to critics who decried its passivity, he upholds participation as the key to understanding spectatorial engagement with television. He describes how television's low-definition images produce "an extraordinary degree of audience participation," greater than any previous medium.¹⁶ Repeating claims made by the television industry, he argues that because television is telepresent and features the ability to generate live content, it embodies the qualities of "nowness" and "all-at-once-ness" that unite the public through a shared experience of watching that is more communal and less isolating than that offered by previous media.¹⁷ For McLuhan, this type of participatory televisual experience was epitomized by the television coverage of events after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy when, during the "four dark days" that followed, every television station in the United States broadcast the events as they unfolded live, with no commercials, incorporating a new televisual form of social unity through the immediacy of broadcasting. While this was an exceptional event grounded in national crisis, McLuhan claims everyday experiences of television watching are similarly socially cohesive, although in a more mundane way.

McLuhan urged visual artists to adopt mediums such as television and use them against "corporate anesthesia," or the numbing effect battered into unprepared consciousnesses by the shock of electronic technologies that was the flipside of his notion of corporate participation.¹⁸ McLuhan wrote in a 1966 article in *Art News* that artists should expose the "set of ground rules for . . . perceptual life that mostly elude recognition" in everyday life.¹⁹ He reimagined the avant-garde artist as a mass communications seer working for the benefit of the public good by creating "anti-environments" in which these ground rules and their "psychic and social consequences" would become perceptible.²⁰ While he often seemed to celebrate the new world of the electronic mass media, he admitted that it could be overwhelming, especially for those of an older generation (his generation) who weren't yet used to

the speed and ubiquity of information it afforded. But he imagined that a younger generation of artists could penetrate televisual spectacle and get to the core of the medium, their artwork becoming “a control situation for the corporate anesthesia engendered by new technology.”²¹

Although McLuhan was often accused of being a shill for the media industry, he was also able to acknowledge the downsides of new mediums and the need to critically engage with them. He wrote that television was particularly ripe for use in artistic anti-environments because in everyday life it “remains quite invisible, while foisting an entirely new set of sensory modalities on the population.”²² Artists who adopted television as more than entertainment could act as an “early warning system” by “making explicit the cultural assumptions” hidden in television and revealing the new sensory modalities it had imposed on society, whether participatory or anesthetizing.²³ When artists began stepping forward to fit this bill in the mid-1960s, they had McLuhan, if not Seldes, in mind. A multimedia art scene influenced by McLuhan flourished in the United States between 1963 and 1967. This scene, which leaned heavily on the use of various electronic and mass media technologies, was a significant point of emergence for early video art. Many of the artists who were part of this scene used television in their explorations of the social effects of the electronic mass media. They didn’t accept television as inherently participatory. Grappling with its anesthetizing effects, they worked to liberate television from its commercial functions by using it to build mass-mediated forms of communion that an older generation of critics thought could be found only in more traditional fine art mediums.

►► Of the artists associated with the multimedia scene of the mid-1960s, Gerd Stern was closest to McLuhan. Stern and the multimedia group he cofounded, USCO, created popular multimedia artworks during the early to middle 1960s, several of which incorporated television in various forms. Young people thronged to participate in projects he developed, which captured the attention of the national media. Stern acquired a copy of McLuhan’s “Report on Project in Understanding New Media” in the early 1960s, which McLuhan had written under the auspices of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters in an attempt to develop a new secondary-school curriculum based on media analysis.²⁴ While the government rejected McLuhan’s pedagogy, the report became the basis for *Understanding Media* and was

very important in Stern's artistic development. During the 1950s, Stern was a Beat poet living in San Francisco. After reading McLuhan's report, as well as encountering pop art and happenings, he shifted his focus from writing to multimedia events incorporating sculpture, installation, and performance. His event *Who R U and What's Happening?*, held at the San Francisco Museum of Art in November 1963, featured live performers (including Allen Ginsberg), slide projections, telephones, sculptural objects, and television sets, among which the audience circulated freely. A concentrated barrage of various mediums filled the space, surrounding and overwhelming the audience. Stern described the piece as "absolute chaos."²⁵ A review in the *San Francisco Chronicle* singled out the importance of television, describing how, in keeping with McLuhan's philosophy, seven or so sets tuned to different programs played in the center of the space throughout.²⁶ Stern justified his use of multimedia by referencing McLuhan in the event's program, citing him on the speed of the Information Age versus the now outmoded "one-thing-at-a-time-ness" of older social structures. Stern hoped that an even more concentrated wash of mediums would liberate the audience by turning casual media consumption into a heightened, ecstatic experience.

Stern's events intensified the audience's experience of the spatialized, electronic simultaneity that McLuhan described as having supplanted earlier, linear forms of social organization grounded in typographic progression.²⁷ This was a theme that McLuhan frequently turned to, recounting how, during the previous several centuries in the West, "the line, the continuum . . . became the organizing principle of life."²⁸ With the rise of the electronic mass media, he wrote, a "unified field" of "electronic all-at-once-ness" emerged, supplanting this previous form with overlapping planes of ever-shifting information whose model was television with its fast-paced, continuously changing flow of moods, tones, and subjects.²⁹ McLuhan identified the launching of the first *Telstar* satellite in 1962 as marking the advent of this unified field, which had produced a "global village" where information could be instantaneously transmitted around the planet, leading to a world of "electronic interdependence."³⁰ In *Who R U and What's Happening?* Stern used various electronic mediums to simultaneously flood the space, giving what the *San Francisco Chronicle's* reviewer called "vast and horrendous" form to McLuhan's all-at-once-ness.³¹ Instead of liberation, the reviewer found this to be an overwhelming experience that numbed him into corporate anesthesia.

The director of the art museum at the University of British Columbia,

Vancouver was more sympathetic. Recognizing Stern's affinity with McLuhan, he invited Stern to Canada to restage *Who R U and What's Happening?* and asked McLuhan to attend. McLuhan gave a lecture in conjunction with the event, although according to Stern he was "taken aback" by its intensity. As it had been for the reviewer, Stern's anti-environment was too much for him. McLuhan admitted to Stern afterward that he was still a Victorian at heart and even disliked pop-up toasters. Nevertheless, McLuhan and Stern appeared together at later speaking engagements, and McLuhan was invigorated by his ongoing discussions with Stern and other multimedia artists. Although he didn't mention Stern directly, McLuhan's 1966 *Art News* essay on the artist as a creator of anti-environments seems to have been written with his work in mind. And in McLuhan's mass-market book, *The Medium Is the Massage*, he linked a discussion of the global village to the kinds of electronic happenings that artists like Stern were pioneering.³²

In 1964 Stern and his wife, Judi, relocated to Woodstock, New York, and founded the group usco (for "Us, Company" or "Us, Co.") with core members Michael Callahan (who previously worked with Stern) and Steve Durkee. Other members of the group included Barbara Durkee and Stewart and Lois Brand, all of whom lived nearby. One of usco's main projects was a multimedia show that evolved over the next several years as it was presented on numerous occasions around the United States and Europe. *Hubbub*, one of its earliest names, was presented at the New Cinema Festival at the Filmmaker's Cinémathèque in New York City. The festival was organized by Jonas Mekas and John Brockman and officially ran from November through December 1965, with related events carrying over into the new year. Mekas decided to organize the festival after seeing avant-garde performances that incorporated moving images by Stan VanDerBeek, Elaine Summers, and others, as well as more mainstream multimedia shows at the 1964 World's Fair in New York, including the Eames Office's widely publicized twenty-two-screen extravaganza in the IBM pavilion. VanDerBeek dubbed this practice "expanded cinema," a term that Mekas and Brockman quickly adopted.³³ The performances at the New Cinema Festival generally included film and slide projections accompanied by theatrical or music performances, emphasizing the all-at-once-ness that McLuhan described. The press release even touted the screening of videotape and video projections. The remarkable list of participants reads like a who's who of the mid-1960s avant-garde: among them were usco, VanDerBeek, Andy Warhol, Ken Dewey, Nam June Paik, La Monte Young,

Jack Smith, Robert Whitman, Robert Rauschenberg, Stan Brakhage, Ken Jacobs, Claes Oldenburg, and many more. The festival was both a technical and critical success. More than twenty artists presented complex, multimedia productions without any major problems, technical or otherwise. A reviewer wrote in the *New Yorker*, “[After taking in] a representative sample of festival programs . . . we came away convinced that the Cinémathèque is fulfilling all its promises, and then some.”³⁴ A number of important projects tied to the history of early video art were shown at the festival.

By all accounts, increased audience participation, which was quickly becoming a noted feature of multimedia work, was the greatest promise that the festival fulfilled. Mekas described expanded cinema as involving the entire audience in a participatory experience, and numerous commentators similarly heralded the ability of this work to facilitate new forms of audience engagement. Taking the New Cinema Festival as one of his primary case studies, John Gruen focused on participation in his 1966 book, *The New Bohemia*. He wrote, describing the events of the festival and similar ones that soon followed, “The point is that the audience, more often than not, is included in the creative act, and what was traditionally a passive role becomes an active one. . . . The audience for the creative New Bohemia is so often an integral part of its creative activities. Moreover, it is an audience whose character is unique to the extent that it does not seek entertainment so much as a sense of participation.”³⁵ Grace Glueck noted that these kinds of multimedia events “encourage total audience participation.”³⁶ Eleanor Lester commented that the “goal [of these events] is to involve audiences or participants in an experience on a direct, even visceral, level.”³⁷ Many of these accounts cited McLuhan as the progenitor of the idea that the Information Age depended upon greater audience engagement even in works of art. They saw these works as realizing new kinds of participation beyond those McLuhan had already found in the mass media. In order to generate a feeling of participation, images were literally projected onto the bodies of the performers and audience. The audience, Lester wrote, was “saturated by media,” realizing McLuhan’s proclamation made in relation to television: “You are the screen. The images wrap around you. You are the vanishing point.”³⁸ Involving audience members meant enveloping them in an environment where their bodies ecstatically dissolved in a flood of lights, sounds, and moving images. Accounts reported how, high on a flow of information and liberated from the constraints of the commercial mass media, audience

members' individual subjectivity was suppressed in favor of group communion with unbridled electronic all-at-once-ness.

Hubbub, a signature work of early psychedelic art, consisted of "a multi-channel media-mix of films, tape, oscilloscope, stroboscope, kinetic and live images."³⁹ It featured a series of projected slides of road and advertising signs intercut with images of the body of a nude woman, proto-psychedelic images kaleidoscopically diffracted through custom-built lenses, and a live performance in which Carolee Schneemann and others interacted with each other and the projections. usco also used an enormous CRT (cathode ray tube) monitor wired to several oscilloscopes in order to generate Lissajous figures that resembled pulsating infinity signs, transforming its video screen into a field for ever-changing abstractions. While the sound and glow of the various media usco deployed inundated the audience, *Hubbub* offered a gentler experience than its clamorous title implies. Mekas commented that its "sea of color, motion and light . . . seems to surround us completely and we swim in it, almost bodily."⁴⁰ *Hubbub's* warm media bath was popular enough that he and Brockman brought it back to the Cinémathèque in January for a two-week encore.

The Broadway theater producer Michael Myerberg, who wanted to take multimedia to the masses, approached Brockman just after the festival ended. Myerberg was in the process of turning an airplane hangar in Queens—the one from which Charles Lindbergh had launched the first solo, nonstop flight across the Atlantic—into a nightclub, naming it the "World" in both Lindbergh's and McLuhan's honor. Discotheques were gaining popularity in Manhattan, and Myerberg thought that having an expanded-cinema environment would distinguish it from competitors. He scouted the New Cinema Festival for talent and asked Brockman to recommend one of the artists from the festival to help him incorporate multimedia into the club. Brockman suggested Ken Dewey, Andy Warhol, and usco as possibilities. Dewey declined to participate. Scared off by the seedier aspects of Warhol's work, Myerberg gave the job to usco. He hired as emcee the disc jockey "Murray the K" Kaufman, who was famous for his close relationship with the Beatles and his love of all things teenage. The Young Rascals, replete with schoolboy's outfits, were the house band, and live music sets were interspersed with recordings of the latest hits. usco projected a complex sequence of films and slides onto small, variously shaped screens hanging above the dance floor. The film and slide material was operated by a punch-card switching system salvaged

from an IBM mainframe computer. The images, projected at a bewilderingly fast pace, included Breughel and Bosch grotesques, World War II dogfights, gnashing gears, and footage of politicians, all synchronized to the recorded music.⁴¹ In conjunction with the films and slides, three television cameras, operated by union cameramen, shot the dancers from above and projected their images live onto a much larger screen hung in the middle.⁴²

The World offered an experience that liberated its audience from the communicative efficiency Meyer Schapiro had described as inherent in the arts of communication. It used the juxtapositions of media collage to push visitors beyond rational thought. The multiplication of images heightened the ecstatic communion of dancing to rock and roll. Through the live television cameras, the dancers' own images were writ large as an integral part of the mix. The dancers communed with each other and with their own televisual images twirling above their heads. Although USCO had previously referenced the glut of images found on television, its installation at the World was distinguished by the same kind of commercial, three-camera setup used to shoot television programs. By transposing this setup to a nightclub setting and using it playfully for closed-circuit surveillance, the World offered a participatory experience at odds with both home viewing and more covert forms of electronic spying. Its television system was an important part of the club's draw and figured significantly in accounts of its opening. One reviewer described early attendees awkwardly wall-flowering the edges of the room. When they looked up, recognizing themselves on screen and realizing that their image would become part of the mix, they began to dance excitedly, "gyrat[ing] toward the screen, with arms raised, like worshippers at [a] mirror altar."⁴³ The screen became a living reflection in which the TV generation could suddenly see its own image. USCO's closed-circuit system was able to capture the audience and bring it together on screen, transporting its members into the new all-at-once-ness of the nonlinear age that McLuhan celebrated. Stern said that communion took place at the World through participation on screen as much as on the dance floor.⁴⁴ The television cameras lifted dancers outside of their own bodies, incorporating them directly into the club's expanded image flow.

The World was a teenage funhouse whose use of television capitalized on the relish that the TV generation found in a rush of nonlinear, electronic flow. It was designed to appeal to kids who could dance all night, riding the highs of sensory overload. In an article on the club, a troubled adult expressed his

concern that there was a dark side to all this mediated ecstasy. He linked the use of multimedia sensory overload to earlier forms of mass spectacle, claiming that disordering the senses was a means of controlling the masses that had been favored for millennia by those in power. "The 'psychedelic' experience," he wrote, "is one of the basic techniques in the repertoire of all totalitarian groups and, projected with enough skill, has always tied its victims closer to the regime of power."⁴⁵ He feared that spaces like the World used disciplinary techniques derived from earlier forms of mass coercion updated by technologies such as televisual surveillance into powerful, new systems of control. According to reports, the dancers at the World generally enjoyed being able to watch themselves become part of the show. Recounting one evening when things went astray, Stern acknowledged the potential for abuse of systems such as the one he'd designed. He described how one night the dancers suddenly stopped dancing and stood mesmerized, swaying in perfect synchronization in front of the screens. Caught in a loop of hypnotized watching, they'd tumbled into an abyss of narcissistic self-surveillance. Too much mediated participation had led to corporate anesthesia, and their disordered senses had shut down. Stern recalled that he could coax them back to life only by turning up the lights and turning off the screens.⁴⁶

Although the members of USCO were skeptical about the project when they agreed to work with Myerberg, Stern said, "The surprise . . . has been that it works."⁴⁷ Despite the occasional lapses into corporate anesthesia, the overall effect was of heightened communion among the dancers. This became evident to Callahan when he abandoned his post above the dancers and lost himself among the images as seen from the floor, getting caught up in the participatory joy of the electronically charged audience. For Stern as well, multimedia environments such as the one at the World suggested that mass-mediated all-at-once-ness could be used to construct a more harmonious people and a healthier public sphere. Teasing out the ramifications of McLuhan's thinking, Stern said of the corporate togetherness that these environments encouraged "The idea of simultaneity is the seed idea of our time. . . . I think if we can hold on for another decade, it's not going to be the people marching in the streets (although I think that's beautiful), but these ideas and this movement in society which will make peace a possibility."⁴⁸ For Stern and USCO, electronic information flow offered a new form of sacrament whose ingestion could soothe the seething body politic.

The television screen continued to be an important component of USCO's

work. In opposition to television's use as a vehicle for entertainment or news, they used it to ecstatically unite people through electronic communion. The monitor they used in *Hubbub* became increasingly significant in subsequent versions of the performance, culminating in *We Are All One*, first presented in Berkeley in June 1966. As Stern recounts, usco was unhappy with the intensity of its earlier performances and was looking for a way to bring the audience back from the often overwhelming effects of unleashed media flow. *We Are All One* began with a barrage of information, as in earlier versions of the performance, but ended by focusing the audience's attention on the monitor while all the other equipment was being shut off. A performer sat on top of it in a meditative pose, chanting along with "one Om-like sine-wave tone, modulated in volume to near silence" while the vibrations of the abstract figures on screen slowly beat down.⁴⁹ usco transformed the electronic screen from an element adding to the general chaos of the performance into a contemplative means of unifying the audience. Over the course of the performance, the out-of-body ecstasy of sensory overload was exchanged for a meditatively focused ecstasy. Stern said, "It was our intention to excite people and to give them the multiplicity sensation and then to bring them back to unity. It worked beautifully; it was amazing."⁵⁰ The audience experienced a benign form of electronic control that was meant to raise their awareness of the ways other forms of media control were creeping into their lives. By teaching viewers how to refocus in the wake of a storm of information, *We Are All One* demonstrated that electronic technologies could be used for mindfulness as much as mental chaos. The screen became the locus of a meditative social unity.⁵¹ Covered in magazines such as *Life*, projects like the World and *We Are All One* had broad appeal and spread the notion of ecstatic electronic liberation to a wider public.⁵²

►► Gerd Stern criticized Andy Warhol's contemporaneous expanded-cinema project, the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, for glorifying celebrity, loneliness, distance, and fear. Stern said that in usco's work "the hug is the personification" of interpersonal communication and that the electronic mass media—even television—could be used for producing new forms of noncommercial communion that warmly enfolded viewers.⁵³ Warhol embraced the politics of control that usco sought to overcome. At Exploding Plastic Inevitable performances and in the film *Outer and Inner Space*, he

demonstrated how televisual immediacy could undermine communion by sending viewers' egos spiraling into dissolution. Although Nam June Paik is often credited as the first artist to use a portable videotape recording system, Warhol was given similar equipment several months before Paik. From mid-summer through the fall of 1965, Norelco lent Warhol a videotape system to test out as a promotional stunt. His use of video equipment overlapped with the founding of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable.

Warhol produced several happenings that featured the Norelco system. Despite the size of the system, he managed to take it out on two occasions for events held at chic dance clubs and covered in the gossip columns.⁵⁴ These video happenings anticipated the liberatory, multimedia participation that USCO would generate at the World and that would be found throughout the New Cinema Festival. The first was held on August 17, 1965, and took place at the Scene, one of New York's earliest discotheques. DJs spun the latest rock 'n' roll records, and the teenage garage band the Executives played. Edie Sedgwick, Warhol's latest superstar, was his consort. He screened his film *Beauty #2* in which she starred, and videotaped the crowd as they watched the film and danced. All the while, a CBS News crew videotaped him taping them. Warhol had planned to use the video footage as part of *The Poor Little Rich Girl Saga*, his day-in-the-life suite of films featuring Sedgwick (who was often described as Warhol's Marilyn Monroe), but it went unused because he was unhappy with it. The second happening was held on Wednesday, September 29, 1965, on abandoned train tracks under the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel that were occasionally used for parties. It culminated in a mock Elizabethan duel staged for taping and instant playback using the video equipment. It was sponsored by *Tape Recording* magazine, which had negotiated the equipment loan from Norelco for a launch party for its first issue, which had Warhol on the cover. In an interview in *Tape Recording*, Warhol said of the recorder that it was "so great at parties [because] people love to see themselves on tape."⁵⁵ Members of the audience could see themselves right away, without waiting, and be instantly memorialized. Regarding further audience participation, he said that one of the primary uses of cheap videotape equipment would be to make pornography, foreseeing that private ecstasy and ecstasy for profit would be as likely an outcome of new developments in television as were forms of mass ecstatic communion.

Warhol's role at the New Cinema Festival was largely downplayed in the press materials. Clearly engaged with its events and building on his video

happenings, he began to put together his own multimedia group, the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, which debuted shortly after the festival ended. He screened *Camp* at the festival, a standardly projected film with no connection to expanded cinema. With its string of amateur performances, it functioned more as television than film, aping, as one reviewer noted, the “TV vaudeville . . . of *The Ed Sullivan Show* or *The Tonight Show*.”⁵⁶ While *Camp* parodies television variety shows by filtering their form through a sieve of hipster irony, it has a pendant that addresses commercial television programming using technology tied to the medium itself. About the same time that he made *Camp*, and using the Norelco video equipment, Warhol recorded five of his friends sitting around on the Factory couch and chatting away while eating takeout Chinese food and watching television. In the Warhol archives, the tape is labeled both *Chinese Dinner* and *The Quintalog* and stars Ondine, Paul Morrissey, Steven Shore, Billy Name, and either Bobby Schwarz or Larry Latreille.⁵⁷ As they watch a broadcast of the film *The Three Stooges Meet Hercules*, they talk mostly about television programs. They discuss the mention of Warhol’s name on *The Tonight Show* the night before and Eartha Kitt’s appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* (“She’s groovy baby!” Ondine exclaims). They also talk about how videotape could be used to preserve not only high culture, like the poetry of their friend, the neo-Beat poet Taylor Meade, but also the low-culture glamour of events like Sal Mineo’s appearance on *Omnibus*. Their conversation itself becomes a sort of omnibus of current television trends. Acknowledging both the pleasure they find in compulsive television viewing and the tranquilized state it reduces them to, Ondine jokingly exclaims as the tape ends, “This fucking television! God help us!” Moving away from the mediated pleasure of Warhol’s video happenings, he hints at the darker side of television and the more troubling effects its reception can have on viewers who fall too deeply under its hypnotic sway.

While *Camp* and *Chinese Dinner* lightheartedly mock the cult of celebrity that drives so much television programming, *Outer and Inner Space* is more critical of how it frames identity. *Outer and Inner Space* features Sedgwick struggling to participate with her own “outer” public persona as represented by her live (or almost live) televised image. It screened at the Cinémathèque on January 27, 1966, on a double bill with Barbara Rubin’s pornographic avant-garde film *Christmas on Earth* just after *Hubbub*’s encore performance. *Outer and Inner Space* is a black-and-white film depicting Sedgwick sitting in front of her own image, which plays on a television set behind her. For

the half-hour length of the film, she struggles with being surveilled by her televisual image. Screened as a side-by-side, double projection, the film presents a dizzying quadruple portrait of Sedgwick told in alternating video/film/video/film. By multiplying Sedgwick's image, Warhol recalls his earlier silk-screen portraits, whose critique of mass production he updates by using contrasting forms of the moving image. In order to generate this effect, Warhol positioned Sedgwick in front of a television set replaying an image of her that he'd just videotaped. Using the Norelco equipment, he videotaped her talking to him, in close-up profile looking to her left, so that her head entirely filled the screen. Turning her in the opposite direction, he then recorded her using 16mm synchronized sound film as they continued their conversation while the videotape played back behind her. He shot two reels of film, each about thirty minutes long. The final film is shown with both reels projected simultaneously, side-by-side, optimally with the first reel on the left and the second on the right. The result is that Sedgwick's videotaped image looks out across her filmed image twice, as though her televisual superego (or is it her id?) is speaking into her filmed image's ear and admonishing (or encouraging?) her. Sitting on her shoulder, her televisual self bedevils her as it chatters away from the just past. Her self-image has become both overwhelmingly present and frustratingly mediated. By having her respond to her taped image, Warhol heightens the strangeness of Sedgwick's experience and undermines the instantaneity of the live television image. Instead of shooting her using a closed circuit, he delays her taped image by several minutes, intensifying its mediation and creating a stronger sense of confusion for both her and the audience.

Warhol makes the physical differences between television and film visible. Because of the different speeds of the television scan and the film shutter, Sedgwick's television image is evanescently aflicker. The scanning fingers of the cathode ray gun are revealed as it draws and redraws her image thirty times as opposed to twenty-four frames per second. This effect is heightened by Gerard Malanga's manipulation of both the television set and the videotape equipment during filming. Over the course of the recording of the film, Malanga turned the set's vertical hold so that Sedgwick's image goes skipping up and down across the screen, rolling first slower and then faster from top to bottom. He desaturated the image, freezing it by stopping the tape so that briefly only the faintest ghost of her television image is left. He stopped and started the tape so that her video image becomes riddled with

noise. Recalling the purposeful use of misalignment and slipshod technique in his silkscreens, Warhol says of his misuse of video in his *Tape Recording* interview, "We like to take advantage of static."⁵⁸ By deforming Sedgwick's video image through real-time manipulation, he exacerbates the monstrosity of her media persona, offering another compelling version of the story of celebrity dissolution in the face of media scrutiny that he told in paintings like his *Marilyn Diptych*, but updated for the age of television. *Outer and Inner Space* shows Sedgwick's psychological struggle with fame at just the moment when television was eclipsing cinema. Instead of disappearing into a fading grid of silk-screened promotional photographs as Monroe does in Warhol's painting, Sedgwick's image dissolves into washes of televisual noise.

The soundtrack of *Outer and Inner Space* is poor due to both the quality of Warhol's equipment and the babble of multiple voices speaking at once. Nevertheless, much of his and Sedgwick's conversation can be understood. She spends most of first reel upset about having to sit in front of her televised image as it speaks from behind her. She almost never turns around to look at herself, despite her discomfort. (Either Warhol directed her to face forward for the consistency of the final image, or she decided to do so herself.) Pinned between Warhol and her outered image, she's doubly scrutinized. She becomes the focus of attention of both Warhol as the off-screen stand-in for the viewer and her inner self transposed into a public media persona. In the face of this pressure she turns to self-scrutiny, spending a considerable amount of time discussing how much she dislikes her appearance. Despite her magnetic radiance, she says of her televised persona, "It's so pathetic. I never dreamed I was so pathetic."⁵⁹ When confronted with herself on television, the glamorous It girl and Warhol superstar feels she doesn't live up to the part. The monitor has become an uncanny mirror, and the sound of her voice, whispering in her ear from the recent past, profoundly disturbs her.

Midway through the second reel she realizes why she's been so bothered. She says, "It's so funny listening to this rather than remembering . . . and it's so real. I could just think it all over again and be right."⁶⁰ Thanks to the insistent present tense of television even when replayed on tape, her past self seems to be immediately there, collapsed onto the present. She can't escape her media persona. The babbling of her outer, mediated self is occulting her ability to have an actual inner life. Acceding to the demands of her outer, public persona, she begins to feel more comfortable and starts to play call-and-response with it as if it had a life of its own. Nevertheless, the second

reel ends on a note similar to the first. At the very the end of the second reel, the videotape is shut off and a static laced image of a live program comes through from a television broadcast, acknowledging the source of the new cult of electronic celebrity that was just beginning to disrupt older models of subjectivity as much as it was displacing mediums such as film. In the *Tape Recording* interview Warhol says, "I believe in television. It's going to take over from the movies," but this was a hostile takeover.⁶¹ *Outer and Inner Space* presents the dark side of participation in a network of celebrity where one's self-image operates beyond one's control. As the set is turned off and the broadcast image winks out, Sedgwick's last words stand as her final response to the expansion of celebrity culture that she was getting further trapped in. "It's like being struck in the back of the head," she says, and then lies down and plays dead, acting as if she's been consumed by the control that her mediated image was asserting over her real self.⁶² Just a few years later she died in real life, as consumed by the excesses of fame as Monroe was before her.

Warhol helps the audience navigate Sedgwick's self-confrontation through the use of two zooms he made while filming, one moving toward her, the other away. Stills from the film generally show her only in close-up, but for most of the film one of the two reels is zoomed out and held in a medium shot. The effect is like that of a magic trick simultaneously shown and revealed. While filming, Warhol zoomed out about halfway through the first reel, revealing the setup of the shot so that Sedgwick can be seen from the waist up with the entire television set visible behind her in the middle of the frame. The second reel begins with the same zoomed-out medium shot but zooms back in to the original position approximately five minutes later. When the reels are double-projected, the left side begins in close-up and the right side begins in a medium shot. After five minutes, the right zooms in to a close-up and holds there for about ten minutes and then the left zooms out to a medium shot. It's only for those ten minutes that the audience is plunged into the disorienting scene of Sedgwick in alternating video and film with no exterior spatial context beyond the boundaries of her multiplied head. The zooms generate a structural narrative for viewers, first giving them the setup, then plunging them into the depths of Sedgwick's self-estrangement, and then releasing them from it. Through the zooms, the audience gains a measure of critical distance over the control network Warhol traps her in.

After he returned the equipment to Norelco that fall, it was years before Warhol bought his own videotape recording equipment and a decade and a

half before he made his own television shows.⁶³ *Outer and Inner Space* was his first film involving multiprojection, a practice he continued in numerous works that followed, including his crossover hit film, *Chelsea Girls*. He also used multiple film projections in the expanded-cinema projects he developed in the wake of his video happenings and in response to the New Cinema Festival. Just after the screening of *Outer and Inner Space*, Andy Warhol's *Up-Tight* appeared at the Cinémathèque. It began with double-screen film projections followed by the blaring noise rock of the Velvet Underground, whose members had participated in several of the festival's events.⁶⁴ Other members of Warhol's entourage projected films on the band while Barbara Rubin aggressively filmed the crowd. Adding to the chaos, Sedgwick go-go-danced, and Malanga swayed erotically with a bullwhip and faked shooting up heroin. Undeterred after losing the commission for the World, Warhol took his show to an East Village nightclub called the Dom, renaming his act the Exploding Plastic Inevitable. Unlike the Cinémathèque, where people in the audience were confined to their seats, the Dom was a hall where they could dance. Warhol didn't have the budget for television cameras, but he added strobe lights and projected other lights and films onto the audience as well as the band. Critics agreed that, in contrast to usco's gentler stewardship of electronic communion, an unholy bond incorporated attendees and performers at the Exploding Plastic Inevitable events. Jonas Mekas's description captures this sentiment well: "The auditorium, every aspect of it—singers, light throwers, strobe operators, dancers—at all times are screaming with an almost screeching, piercing personality pain. I say pain; it could also be called desperation. In any case, it is the last stand of the ego before it either breaks down or goes to the other side."⁶⁵ While Mekas found this to be a worthwhile experience, other reviewers were unsure, calling the performances confusing, decadent, perverted, and even demonic.⁶⁶ Ironically, McLuhan chose an image of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable and not usco as an illustration in *The Medium Is the Massage*. For McLuhan, the Exploding Plastic Inevitable epitomized the extreme edges of a generation whose senses had been "pre-conditioned by television commercials to abrupt zooms, elliptical editing, no story lines, flash cuts."⁶⁷ Even without television-related technologies, the Exploding Plastic Inevitable was a devilish extension of commercial television's formal tropes come harrowingly to life. It was the darkness to *We Are All One's* light, the yang to its yin. Like an anticommercial *cri de coeur* issued from the underground, the assault of its hypermediated all-at-once-ness

swallowed participants in an overwhelming electronic surround that either beat them into submission or drove them away, egos battered, ears ringing, and pupils dilated.

►► Of all the artists who participated in the New Cinema Festival, Nam June Paik was the only one who made television a career-long preoccupation—so much so that he became known as the “George Washington of video art,” despite concomitant experiments by usco, Andy Warhol, and others.⁶⁸ Paik says his chief preoccupation during the 1960s was giving audience members the ability to “transform [their] TV set from a passive pastime to active creation,” which meant transforming media consumers into media producers.⁶⁹ He dreamed of an interactive mass media based on television long before computers helped accomplish this.⁷⁰ In his early work, he began turning television sets into proto-musical instruments and worked during the 1960s to develop this idea. His goal was for viewers to be able to compose electronic images in much the same way that audio synthesizers were allowing for the composition of electronic sounds. During the 1950s, he studied music composition in Germany with Karlheinz Stockhausen and John Cage, who had both begun working with electronics, and made a number of his own audiotape-based compositions influenced by Pierre Schaeffer’s *musique concrète*. In subsequent years, Paik designed numerous works that he hoped would overcome the passivity of everyday television watching by turning the set into a playable instrument. He wanted to transform the way members of the audience engaged with the medium by making their viewing experience more akin to playing the piano or painting a picture, and he imagined a global public sphere where the people, transformed into a network of electronic composers, would share their compositions with one another. His earliest work as a visual artist included a series of modified, playable television sets. His last major project of the decade, and the culmination of his participatory television work, was the development of a video synthesizer that he hoped would reach the marketplace. Summarizing this trajectory, he wrote with characteristically off-color humor, “[The] video synthesizer is the accumulation of my nine years’ TV-shit turned into a real-time video piano.”⁷¹ Over the course of the 1960s, Paik turned television into a means of creating visual music based in real-time image collage, which he thought

would liberate television by opening it onto avant-garde experimentation and other noncommercial uses.

Capturing his transition from a career in music to one in the visual arts, Paik titled his debut exhibition *Exposition of Music / Electronic Television*. It was held in 1963 at the Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal, Germany, for only nine days and consisted of an entire house filled with hybrid musical sculptures.⁷² By calling it an “exposition” rather than an “exhibition,” he evoked the ambience of a world’s fair or a technological exposition. He was there daily, presenting his television sets and demonstrating how to operate the ones that were playable. There was a note of irony in the show’s title because most of the work appeared to have been cobbled together from junk. Eleven altered television sets in the garden room were a featured attraction. They were the most technologically advanced work on display, although even they were as crudely modified as the other work on display. He abstracted the image on all of the sets in various ways until they became unwatchable in the conventional sense, and thus made their picture tubes the grounds for electronic versions of modernist painting. While he permanently misadjusted the picture on some, others could be manipulated by viewers in various ways that allowed them to create their own limited televisual compositions consisting of abstract patterns of shimmering dots or quivering lines.

The strategy of formalizing the televisual image by filtering it through the language of modernism informed all of Paik’s early video work. He said of these works, “I make very serious art, higher than popular commercial art. . . . I always thought television was a great medium, but I hated the mass-media part.”⁷³ Like many of his statements, this one should be taken with a grain of salt. Much of Paik’s work was predicated on a humorous lightness with broad appeal. Nevertheless, he clearly hoped to transform television into a format capable of sustaining the kind of communion that Schapiro described in relation to abstract painting. In an attempt to raise the medium to the status of a fine art, Paik adopted strategies from the visual and musical avant-garde. His manipulations of the televisual image moved between total abstraction and the radical juxtapositions of surrealist collage filtered through his training in Cage’s indeterminacy and *musique concrète*. While the museum broadcasts made in previous decades had also set out to raise the bar on television’s content from middle- to highbrow, Paik sought to transform television by radically abstracting its form, transgressing the opposition between fine art

and the arts of communication. By mapping the expressive plasticity of the avant-garde onto television, he fought technological alienation from within in a bid to allow for the kinds of creative authenticity linked to the hand of the artist that had been associated with abstract expressionism. Whereas Meyer Schapiro had claimed that paintings, as among the last and most significant handmade objects in a world overrun by technology, could function as a humanist bulwark against the instrumentalization of communication, Paik's stated goal was "to humanize . . . technology."⁷⁴ He thought that giving viewers a creative hand in the making of televisual images would set them free from the constraints of network television, and he imagined a time when home viewers would become television artists, producing content in their own home studios that would rise above the lows of commercial programming.

In a statement about his work that Paik made around the same time as his 1963 exposition, he said that his main intent was to foster the creation of "music of the people, by the people, for the people."⁷⁵ In the essay he described reacting against Stockhausen and Cage because he was seeking an even more radical re-envisioning of the arts than they were, based entirely on audience participation. His goal was for members of his audience to have the ability to participate in creating their own productions using tools like the ones that he'd cobbled together for his show. As Gerd Stern had done earlier, Paik began reading Marshall McLuhan in the mid-1960s. He disagreed with McLuhan that television was inherently participatory but thought that it could be made so. His solution to this problem was to transform the set into an instrument that would allow viewers to radically remix broadcast images. Focusing on the manual creativity made possible by the direct manipulation of the video signal, he wrote in a manifesto-like statement in 1965, "As collage technic replaced oil-paint, the cathode ray tube will replace the canvas. Someday artists will work with capacitors, resistors & semi-conductors as they work today with brushes, violins & junk."⁷⁶ Paradoxically (if not ironically), he would attempt to make television a people's medium through new forms of set-based playability rooted in abstraction, assuming that the public would prefer avant-garde artistic difficulty over readily digested mass entertainment. Although his early sets were fragile and their range of image production limited, he hoped one day to fully cede control to the public by allowing them to make formally advanced television works of their own. Paik upheld a vision of avant-garde media populism in which the public would actively create works of art using their sets. Instead of listlessly watching phantom worlds drift by, the people

would commune in a shared creative enterprise by generating electronic visual music that would aesthetically transcend previous forms of television as a mere instrument for distributing information or entertainment.

In an affront to commercial television, Paik modified his sets to disfigure the broadcast video signal. He turned off their volume to emphasize the image and used whatever was coming over the air as source material. He internally altered some of the sets in order to transform their video signal into fields of lines, cylindrical shapes, or sine waves. He externally applied magnets and degaussers to others, causing their images to twist and whirl beyond recognition. Like a mad scientist, he wired several sets to radios and other electronic devices, using the input from the attached device to produce still more deformations.

To interact with the set titled *Participation tv*, the first version of which was shown at the exposition, the viewer speaks into a microphone wired to it. The audio signals are electronically transformed into a spray of dots that expand and contract on screen in response to the volume and cadence of the speaker's voice, making the image completely dependent on audience participation. In 1966 Paik updated *Participation tv* using a color television, two microphones, and an amplifier allowing viewers to produce slightly more variable images. In this version, the viewer's speech produces a tangle of multicolored lines that leap from a small blob in the center of the screen to swirl and twist around each other, generating a sequence of changing organic abstractions that look like a cross between Jackson Pollock and Wols. In both versions, Paik offers viewers an intimate measure of control over the image through closer physical engagement with the set than found in ordinary interactions with a television set. Rather than push a button or turn a dial, viewers literally breathe life into the image, incorporating it with their breath.

Paik moved to the United States in 1964. During the next several years, he presented a series of expositions in which he demonstrated further possibilities for increased participation in television. In 1965 he won a \$6,000 grant from the John D. Rockefeller III Foundation, with which he purchased a significant amount of television-related equipment, including a Sony videotape recording system. Sony had introduced its new Videocorder to the American public in June, highlighting the immediacy of its instantly replayable image, in contrast to film images, which required processing.⁷⁷ Like Andy Warhol, Paik quickly discovered that he could misadjust his equipment, enabling him to produce abstractions that built upon the ones he'd produced on his earlier manipu-

lated sets. He brought along as much of his equipment as he could to these demos, using it live, in front of the audience in an avant-garde version of the kinds of promotional performances put on by the corporations themselves. Upon his arrival in the United States, the New Cinema Festival was one of the most prominent events at which Paik showed his television experiments. While “videotape” and “video projections” are listed in the various mediums included at the festival, Paik seems to have been the only person besides usco members to use them. Paik’s exact contribution to the festival is unclear. The Cinémathèque’s press release billed his program as “electronic video projections.”⁷⁸ Photographs from the festival show Paik performing in front of *Zen for Film*, a film projection consisting solely of clear leader that accumulates dust and scratches each time it’s played. The program notes mentioned that *Videotape Essay No. 1* was on display and that, along with other performance-based pieces, Paik would be screening “electronic television . . . filmed and edited by Stan VanDerBeek.”⁷⁹ Typed notes also exist in which Paik describes actions to be performed at the festival while the filmed television manipulations play, including thrusting out his hand and tongue, and female performers waving their hair around and reading texts. One review of the festival describes Paik “manipulat[ing] the video image on a dozen old tv sets” as he did at his demos.⁸⁰ Another describes Paik coming onto the stage, dropping his pants to moon the audience, and wrapping the audience in videotape.⁸¹ None of these accounts are incompatible, and everything they mention could have been part of the performance. The videotape wrapping, where he bound the audience into the work by literally tying them together in a parody of McLuhan’s corporate participation, was the most directly participatory of the actions described. After the festival, Paik continued to provocatively engage with McLuhan and notions of audience participation. He and cellist Charlotte Moorman, his muse and frequent collaborator, appeared in the television program “This Is Marshall McLuhan: The Medium Is the Massage” on NBC in 1967.⁸² Paik was featured on the show as the embodiment of McLuhan’s notion of the artist as media seer. When the program was aired, Paik videotaped images from the program and remixed them into a work he titled *McLuhan Caged*, a tribute to two of his most important interlocutors. Thanks to Paik’s manipulations, McLuhan’s face swirls as if being sucked down a drain, a formal strategy Paik reused in later work.

Videotape Study No. 3 is one of the few extant pieces by Paik from this time. Made circa 1967 with filmmaker Jud Yalkut (who also worked with usco), it



Nam June Paik, *Videotape Study No. 3* (1967)

consists of remixed images of two separate, televised press conferences, one of President Lyndon B. Johnson and the other of newly elected New York City Mayor John Lindsay. Yalkut filmed Paik's television manipulations as VanDerBeek previously had, so the final work is on film rather than tape. In this film, unlike Paik's previous work, the soundtrack, by composer David Behrman, plays a significant role. Throughout the film, the image starts and stops. The screen is constantly aflicker, rolling, moving, jerking forward in time, like a succession of stills or an animation rather than television images. Static constantly interrupts the two scenes, which hiccup as they pause and restart. Paik achieved this effect by using his hands to slow the passage of the videotape through the uptake reels. The static was generated by the application of an electric current through a wire run along the surface of the tape, misaligning its magnetic filings. The soundtrack fades in and out. Johnson is asked about segregation and the "diseases of our body politic," but his response is distorted into a barely intelligible echo that mimics the roiling, distressed image. In counterpoint to the image, a steadily pulsing, heartbeat-like sound runs throughout, rhythmically unifying the tape's glitches and repetitions. When Lindsay first appears, he's discussing, apparently off the record, the poses he strikes at press conferences for the cameras. The audio returns to Johnson's garbled voice, and the video ends with the ironic sound of applause and the image of static played over the final credits.

Paik purposely manipulated the original footage in order to strip away its

original political content. His use of the two television press conferences as raw material highlights the role that the electronic mass media was playing in generating pseudo-events designed to be covered by the mass media.⁸³ In the middle of the tape, Paik's fingers appear from the right side of the frame, inserting themselves in front of the television screen and dispelling the illusion that the viewer is looking directly at the image. He reaches out to touch the television screen, breaking the fourth wall by making visible his role as a disruptor of the original broadcasts. In so doing, he downplays the content of the politicians' speeches in favor of abstraction and the play of the artist's hand, a strategy explicitly acknowledged in program notes written for the piece: "In *Videotape Study No. 3*, programmed images . . . reiterate gestures and movements and follow one another in a flowing television collage as images familiar to any contemporary consciousness, abstracted from any political connotations, images repeated and metamorphosed into abstraction. Popular images are thus transmuted beyond their popular meanings."⁸⁴

Paik abstracts the broadcast image just enough that it loses its original signification. His flowing collage undermines the communicative efficiency of the mass media in the service of a higher form of artistic anti-communication. He replaces the original's spectacular politics with avant-garde media manipulations intended to challenge the affect generated by television's normally seamless immediacy and the corporate participation McLuhan claims it fostered. For Paik participation in television was a way of reclaiming low culture for high and ignoring the role of television as part of the fourth estate, even when this meant divesting the public sphere of its ability to produce a people grounded in issues related to governance and the speech of its leaders. *Videotape Study No. 3* suggests that the public should have the power to silence the pseudo-political speech promoted by the electronic mass media, dismissing McLuhan's claim that television created a people united around political events like John F. Kennedy's assassination or civil rights. Paik viewed television as one big pseudo-event ripe for artistic appropriation, and he thought that there would be no true art "of the people, by the people, for the people" unless the public could participate in making the same kinds of avant-garde anti-communication that he was.

In 1968 Paik was appointed artist-in-residence at WGBH in Boston and worked on two major projects while there, the exhibition *The Medium Is the Medium* and the development of a video synthesizer. Named in reference to McLuhan, *The Medium Is the Medium* debuted on March 23, 1969. It

was the first group exhibition of avant-garde video art shown on broadcast television and the first exhibition anywhere dedicated solely to video art. Paik was its guiding light. Most of what was aired was very much in line with his work, taking a neomodernist approach to television as a medium by focusing less on content than on the qualities of the video image itself: its grain, its movement, its color, and so on. Given the program's formalist concerns, it could have aired only on public television. Early video art was almost never shown on commercial television in the United States because network executives considered it too highbrow for the masses and unlikely to garner good ratings. Public television, which eschewed advertising in favor of a mix of government funding, private funding, and public fundraising, was becoming one of the primary sources of economic support for early video art. Public television stations weren't yet using ratings and had been founded in part to support fine-art broadcasting, although usually this meant classical music performances or theater. A few brave producers, including Fred Barzyk at WGBH, Boston, David Loxton at WNET, New York, and Brice Howard at KQED, San Francisco, embraced video art, and their stations became leaders in supporting it. Raising the profile of television as a medium with aesthetic possibilities beyond those found on the commercial networks, they not only produced work but also made sure it was widely aired and received significant press attention.⁸⁵

The Medium Is the Medium featured work by Paik, Aldo Tambellini, Otto Piene, James Seawright, Thomas Tadlock, and Allan Kaprow. It roughly imitated the form of a television variety show with single pieces by each artist, each about five minutes long, shown in sequence. The press release touted the program as setting out "to find new ways of using television as an electronic art form."⁸⁶ It started with an announcer saying in voiceover that these artists "all see in television an immediate way of reaching a vast audience . . . [and] creating a museum for millions." While earlier museum broadcasts had attempted to bring artworks into the homes of the public, *The Medium Is the Medium* took a significant step toward using television as a basis for both making and distributing works of art. All of the artists involved conceived their works specifically for broadcast television, self-reflexively using the medium itself as their ground. Most followed in Paik's shoes by concentrating on manipulating the video signal to create various forms of distortion and abstraction. Allan Kaprow's *Hello* was the exception to the rule. *Hello* featured footage of a gamelike performance Kaprow had held in the Boston area in



Allan Kaprow, *Hello* (1969)

which he connected several sites using proto-video conferencing technology. Participants attempted to communicate with each other through the ad hoc network while Kaprow randomly switched their images from site to site. His goal, he said, was to court miscommunication as much as communication.⁸⁷ In the taped version that aired as part of the broadcast, the participants, including Paik, handled this difficulty with good humor.

Paik contributed *Electronic Opera No. 1* to *The Medium Is the Medium*, concluding the program by demonstrating the kinds of advanced image manipulation he was developing with his video synthesizer. In an unpublished manuscript written in 1967, he notes that opera hasn't significantly changed since Wagner and that electronic instrumentation has been used in recent operas only for special effects. He describes his hope of composing a "total electronic opera" based entirely on electronic media.⁸⁸ *Electronic Opera No. 1* was his first attempt to realize this. Its soundtrack begins with Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* accompanying shots of a topless female dancer whose image is doubled and tripled over itself in various brilliant hues. Over the music a narrator ironically intones, "This is participation TV. Please follow instructions." Abstract shapes in multicolored hues set against a black background shift from twirling infinity symbols to jagged balls of vibrating energy. Paik's voice comes over the soundtrack with droll instructions on exactly how the



Nam June Paik, *Electronic Opera No. 1* (1969)

viewer should participate: “Close your eyes. Open your eyes. Three-quarter-close your eyes. Two-third-open your eyes.” Despite the hard work he’d put into the creation of this phantasmagoric telecollage, he beseeches viewers to obscure their vision or even blind themselves to it. To participate in this way would mean tuning out the televisual image at its most colorfully seductive. After his voiceover ends, an image appears of President Richard Nixon at a press conference appointing John Mitchell to the post of attorney general. Nixon’s voice briefly interrupts the piano music, although what he says is cut into snippets, becoming nonsensical. Paik once again negates a political pseudo-event, this time by sending both Nixon’s and Mitchell’s heads spiraling as he had McLuhan’s.

The soundtrack cuts to synthesized versions of classical music. Close-up images of three male hippies whose shading is electronically reversed and recolored alternate with more abstract shapes. The narrator’s voice comes back over the soundtrack in conversation with Paik:

NARRATOR: I don’t know. I’m getting awfully bored.

PAIK: Ohhh. Thank God it’s the last one.

NARRATOR: Well, what do we do now?

PAIK: Well, let’s start it again from the beginning.

At this point the whole thing restarts, repeating the opening shot with the original voiceover regarding participation TV. Then, abruptly, the narrator gives a new participatory command — “Turn off your television sets!” — and the screen goes black, ending Paik’s video and the program as a whole. The narrator’s call to turn off the set as a form of viewer participation is half a critique of one-way broadcasting and half self-parody. Paik reduces McLuhan’s corporate participation to following commands and notes that boredom is as likely an outcome of viewing avant-garde video art as is a heightened sense of interpersonal communion. Moreover, the instructions the audience receives on how to participate largely involve not watching at all, a practice advised by many of television’s toughest critics.

However ironically, Paik was nevertheless attempting to recast fine art into a form suitable for television. His goal in *Electronic Opera No. 1* and the program as a whole was a synthesis of the arts of music, dance, and painting in a high-cultural form that might also have popular appeal. Adopting the omnibus format of the television variety show, *The Medium Is the Medium* tried to short-circuit viewers’ expectations with something more formalist than *The Ed Sullivan Show* but equally engaging. But as the sardonic comments made by Paik and the narrator indicate, the level of interest this work generated was not yet up to the standards of Gleason or Martin, let alone Wagner or Verdi. As part of the broadcast itself, Paik was acknowledging that video art’s reach still fell short of its creators’ most ambitious aspirations. *The Medium Is the Medium* may have trumped commercial broadcasting with the beauty of its images, but Paik recognized that this wasn’t necessarily enough to carry the interest of viewers through even a half an hour of programming. Despite their best attempts, in Paik’s estimation he and the other artists had still capitulated to corporate anesthesia, and the only reasonable response for viewers was to participate by tuning out. Nevertheless, *The Medium Is the Medium* stands as a testament to the growing relevance of television to the art world. It had gone from being an accessory to expanded artistic events to being a form whose aesthetic possibilities were worthy of exploration in their own right and of public exhibition via channels capable of reaching millions of viewers. The first rather than the final word in video art, the broadcast took an initial step toward transforming television into the kind of creative medium Paik envisioned, offering a set of experiments that public television stations would continue to support for years to come.

While working on *The Medium Is the Medium*, Paik also helped organize

the exhibition *TV as a Creative Medium*. Held at the Howard Wise Gallery, New York, from May 17 to June 14, 1969, it was the earliest gallery exhibition focused solely on video art.⁸⁹ Like *The Medium Is the Medium*, it consisted largely of pieces that abstracted the video signal in various ways. Reviewers found the exhibition engaging. One noted that “participation is key to the show.”⁹⁰ Another agreed, specifically praising Paik’s work and saying that all of the work in the show “uses the immediacy of the television medium, the instantaneous capability that has the viewer feeling that he’s present during moments of creation. No art form could hope to convey more.”⁹¹ Paik exhibited a third version of *Participation TV*, this time totally revamped as a closed-circuit installation. In this version, three live cameras act as the input for on-screen abstractions. The cameras capture the image of anyone who walks in front of them, sending it to a color monitor, where it is split three ways, once for each of the monitor’s color beams. Viewers appear on-screen in red, blue, and green silhouettes, each slightly offset from the others. As they move in front of the camera, their multiplied images float across the screen, pulled apart from their normal on-screen appearance into apparitions that self-reflexively put on display the construction of the color television image, with its three color beams. As in his earlier works with this name, viewer participation is necessary for the production of the image, but the potential for viewers to create a wide variety of images is still limited, although less so.

The video synthesizer that Paik was simultaneously building with engineer Shuya Abe folded the camera feedback he used in the third version of *Participation TV* into a system that made a wide range of image manipulation possible.⁹² Paik said his goal for the video synthesizer was to allow anyone to produce programs of the highest aesthetic quality from the comfort of her or his living room. Predicting a day when such equipment would become widespread, he wrote, “Such a versatile color synthesizer will become . . . standard equipment like today’s Hammond organ or Moog synthesizer.”⁹³ The video synthesizer was Paik’s ultimate, playable televisual instrument, and he wanted it to reach the hands of the public so that the television audience would have its own means of warping and remixing video images however it saw fit. Despite his own avant-garde aspirations, he recognized that viewers might participate in television production by using the synthesizer to make “groovy TV” that would function “like today’s mood music” for relaxation purposes in the home or to generate psychedelic light shows in nightclubs.⁹⁴ He thought the video synthesizer might even offer an alternative to taking

drugs, which he saw as an attempt by the young to “recover the sense of participation [whose] basic cause lies in our passive state of mind, such as TV watching.”⁹⁵ For Paik, by making their own groovy shows the television generation could creatively liberate themselves from the bondage of both drugs and commercial programming. He saw a bright future for the video synthesizer as an instrument the viewing public could use for imaginative purposes, whether for avant-garde anti-communication or for ecstatic technological communion.

The Paik/Abe Synthesizer allowed for a number of plastic transformations of the video signal, including the 360-degree rotation of images; the rippling and rolling of images; the overlapping of multiple images; the use of feedback-based images; the production of a small group of signal-based deformations (two types of sweep modulation patterns: a waveform pattern and a sine-square oscillation pattern); and the production of a wide range of bright, highly saturated colors that could be layered on top of and next to each other. It made its official debut on August 1, 1970, when Paik and a group of collaborators broadcast a live four-hour program on WGBH.⁹⁶ Called *Video Commune: Beatles from Beginning to End*, it features an ever-changing live video collage set to Beatles music. In choosing to set his video collage to pop music, Paik was making a concession to popular taste, putting aside his earlier commitment to opera. Nevertheless, its images are similar to those used in *Electronic Opera No. 1*, ranging from signal-generated abstractions, to transformations of taped footage of the Beatles, dancers, and other musicians, to nonmanipulated footage taped from Japanese television. “Please do your own thing,” a voiceover says at the start of the program. “Treat [this program] like an electronic wallpaper or a lightshow. It has no beginning, no end. You may tune in. You can go out and come back. We’ll be here, for four hours.” Like the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s experimental broadcast of works from its collection with music playing in the background, *Video Commune* gave viewers a chance to commune with art on the their TV screen. Whereas the Metropolitan’s broadcasts emphasized original works of art as found in the museum, Paik emphasized both the television studio, which was on view throughout his broadcast, and the video signal as he and his collaborators deformed it in various ways. In the Metropolitan’s broadcast, television was second to the art on display; in Paik’s broadcast, it was the primary medium of the art itself. In pushing its length to four hours, Paik heightened the existing tendency for networks to design television programming to be consumed in

states of distraction. With the sum being greater than any particular part, Paik conceded to audience boredom by acknowledging that there was no need to view the program as a whole with sustained attention. Given the times, *Video Commune* was likely watched in complement with drug use rather than as an alternative to it. It's easy to imagine a group of hippies sitting around a Boston crash pad, smoking pot and communally bonding over their favorite Beatles songs set to Paik's own version of groovy TV. In an attempt to make the piece as directly participatory as possible, Paik included members of the general public by inviting them off the street in front of the studio to come up and use the synthesizer live, on the air; otherwise, the work still operated as a one-way broadcast.

At about the one-hour mark, over images closely resembling those in *Electronic Opera No. 1*, a narrator gives a series of instructions to the at-home audience on how to participate in their own rudimentary synthesis of Paik's already synthesized images. The narrator intones once again, "Dear audience, this is participation TV." Rather than close their eyes, he suggests that viewers turn the knobs on their sets, "so that you can talk back to the synthesizer symbolically." Without a synthesizer, this kind of participation was little more than symbolic.

While highly useful in Paik's own work and that of the few other artists who gained access to it, the video synthesizer was too temperamental and expensive to mass-produce, and it never reached the wider public. Although Paik continued to explore the idea of media participation and communion in his writing, in subsequent work he largely abandoned direct participation. He went on to use the video synthesizer in a number of single-channel pieces designed for television broadcast and in the video matrixes that became his primary sculptural form in later years, but giving viewers the ability to create their own avant-garde video works eluded him. Instead, this work stood as a model of unrealized potential until recently, when technology rooted in digital media helped the people become media manipulators on a broad scale.

►► Thanks to the success of the New Cinema Festival, John Brockman was asked to help organize the special events programming for the 1966 New York Film Festival. He and the cineaste Amos Vogel put together a series of screenings and panels on the theme of independent cinema. In conjunction with these events, Brockman invited Ken Dewey to create a work for

the lobby and lower level of Philharmonic Hall, where he showed *Selma Last Year*.⁹⁷ *Selma Last Year* was an expanded cinema installation based on his personal experience of the 1965 freedom march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. Featuring photographs by Bruce Davidson and audio by Dewey and Terry Riley, it had been touring around Chicago. Upon bringing it to New York, Dewey added videotaped news footage of the march and closed-circuit television surveillance to capture and replay visitors' responses to the previously broadcast footage. Reflecting the civil rights movement's own media savvy, Dewey incorporated television in *Selma Last Year* because it was one of the most significant mediums through which the U.S. public was consuming the events associated with the struggle for civil rights. He used it to shock his audience into questioning their own participation, or lack thereof, in the movement.

Dewey began his career collaborating with choreographer Anna Halprin in San Francisco on several dance performances in the early 1960s. He then traveled to Europe, where his happening *The Gift*, made in collaboration with Riley, nearly triggered a riot. Much of the audience walked out thanks in part to Riley's soundtrack, which made use of audiotape-based time delay. Riley prerecorded audio with the jazz trumpeter Chet Baker and dancer John Graham for use during the live performance. Working with the studio's engineer, he redoubled the sounds they recorded at slightly different speeds so that they moved in and out of phase. A similar technique was used in radio to delay broadcasts for censoring inappropriate comments, but Riley shortened the time between the original sound and its replay to create a variable-speed echo effect. The results were startling. Sounds quickly moved from recognizable to unrecognizable, piling up on themselves percussively until they dissolved into washes of noise.⁹⁸ In one section of the soundtrack, Riley delayed Graham saying, "She moves she," which is followed by an unidentifiable squawk and a banging sound. Because of the delay, the sounds shifted from clarity to a violently dense wall of reverberating sounds. Played back as part of Dewey's long, abstract performance, the taped music alone would likely have been enough to drive away an audience not yet used to the wail of electronic noise as a musical experience.

Dewey returned to the United States and relocated to New York City. He teamed up with Riley again at the New Cinema Festival on a piece called *Sames* featuring five women wearing bridal outfits with films projected over them and the surrounding space. Riley provided three tape-delay pieces for

the soundtrack. The first was Graham saying the word “I” with various inflections, delayed for eight minutes into a buzzing drone. Then came the voice of Riley’s young daughter saying, “That’s not you,” echoed and delayed for twenty minutes. The piece concluded with Riley’s own voice saying, “It’s me” on delay for another twenty minutes. The effect, according to one review, was “almost hallucinatory.”⁹⁹ Although the audience members were stationary, the reviewer wrote, their senses were heightened to the point that the performance triggered “an explosive degree of consciousness.”¹⁰⁰ Dewey would further develop this effect using closed-circuit videotape delay in *Selma Last Year*.

Dewey had attended the civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery several months before participating in the New Cinema Festival. The march was a high point in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference’s (SCLC) campaigns in the South. Led by Martin Luther King, Jr., it followed two previous campaigns that the SCLC had undertaken in Georgia and Alabama. Although the campaigns were designed to capture the attention of the national media, thereby shining a light on southern racism, the first, in Albany, Georgia, had garnered little notice. Local authorities responded to the nonviolent protesters equally nonviolently, and arrests took place with little fuss. The second, in Birmingham, Alabama, brought national outrage when images of white police unleashing dogs and water hoses against black protestors appeared in newspapers and on television. These first two campaigns were broad challenges to discrimination and the legacy of Jim Crow. In an attempt to present a clearer image to the mass media, the event’s organizers aimed their third campaign, in Selma, solely at voters’ rights. Their goal was to compel the Alabama legislature to enforce equal access to the polls, by challenging obstacles put in the way of black voter registration. They ultimately wanted to bring enough pressure to bear on the national government that Congress would be forced to pass an official voting rights act to bolster the Fourteenth Amendment. The organizers were attempting to force political change by creating an image of the people rising up to speak truth to power—an image designed to circulate in the media. They knew that while newspapers played an important role, so did television because of the impact of its moving images.¹⁰¹

Dewey went to Alabama in mid-March, ostensibly as a journalist working on behalf of the Finnish Broadcasting Company.¹⁰² Two previous attempts to march in protest from Selma to Montgomery had failed. The first, on March 7, had ended disastrously when police attacked protestors at an event that the press quickly dubbed “Bloody Sunday.” After crossing the Edmund Pet-

tus Bridge on the outskirts of Selma, fifty-seven people were injured when state troopers and local police gassed and brutally beat the protestors with nightsticks and whips while a white crowd cheered from the sidelines. ABC's news cameras captured the event, which they broadcast in a special report that interrupted regular programming. Shown on television, images of the beatings sparked an outcry from citizens around the country, galvanizing President Johnson, who quickly worked to pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965. A week after the violence, Johnson appeared before members of Congress in a televised broadcast in which he denounced what had taken place and beseeched them to pass the bill. This was a clear exception to notions that television induced passivity and political apathy in its audience, proving that television could function as a vital part of the fourth estate. The public's reaction to television broadcasts of Bloody Sunday, as well as the broader coverage in the mass media, led directly to government action. The marchers succeeded in mobilizing the sympathy of the supposedly passive viewing public, who rose up in the name of the people to lobby the government for change. As part of the fourth estate, television played a crucial role in the conflict by acting as mediator between events, the people at large, and the government.

Protestors once again attempted to march to Montgomery on March 9 and were turned back. They made a final, successful attempt under protection of the U.S. Army and the National Guard a week and a half later. With Dewey in attendance, they left on March 21, arriving on March 24. The television networks set up temporary relay stations along the route, providing live coverage of the event and putting further pressure on Congress to pass the bill, which it finally did in August. During the march, Dewey brought along a tape recorder and captured interviews with both marchers and people on the sidelines, as well as ambient sounds. His goal was to record the event from all possible points of view. Following best journalistic practices regarding balanced reporting, he taped scores of people who held various, conflicting opinions. After returning to New York, Dewey spent several months trying to figure out what to do with the tapes and how to address the civil rights movement. Before putting them to use he staged the happening *Without & Within* in response to the march, linking the external violence of U.S. imperialism in Vietnam ("without") to the internal violence taking place in the South ("within"). In notes to *Without & Within*, he wrote that he wanted to create a situation in "which Saigon and Selma join as outer and inner mirrors of the dilemma we face."¹⁰³ Dewey's piece concluded with the audience participating



Aldo Tambellini, *Black* (1969)

in a game of tug-of-war that evolved into an ecstatic, collective dance, set to rock and roll. As was becoming increasingly common in happenings and expanded-cinema events, as well as in the nightclubs they inspired, Dewey transformed members of the audience into performers so that they could work through their everyday aggression in a participatory, even therapeutic, communal environment. *Without & Within* turned simulated violence into a more peaceful form of group psychological release.

Dewey was one of several artists in the multimedia happenings scene who were addressing issues linked to the civil rights movement. Nam June Paik touched on the racial problems troubling the country in *Videotape Study No. 3*, only to abstract away the specifics of this conflict.¹⁰⁴ Aldo Tambellini also addressed civil rights in several of his contemporaneous “black” works and did much the same. At the New Cinema Festival he showed *Black Zero*, which featured slide projections and other visual elements in conjunction with free jazz, a sculptural noise machine, and dancers. It began with a recording of Calvin Hernton’s poem “Jitterbugging in the Streets,” recounting a 1964 riot in Harlem. Over the course of the piece, an enormous balloon with images projected on it was inflated and floated over the heads of the audience, bursting as the piece ended. One reviewer said of *Black Zero* and its exploding balloon, “As a symbolic comment on the explosive racial situation in this country,

Mr. Tambellini's work was a painfully literal experience. On another level as well, it was a highly effective piece of abstract theater."¹⁰⁵ Later iterations of *Black Zero* featured television sets on stage flashing abstract black-and-white images. Another variation, made in collaboration with Otto Piene, was broadcast on German television in 1968, and in 1969 Tambellini transformed the piece yet again for airing in the United States under the title *Black*, which was included in *The Medium Is the Medium*. In this version, Tambellini invited a number of African American schoolchildren into WGBH's studio and taped them running around and chanting the chorus to James Brown's recent hit, "Say It Loud (I'm Black and I'm Proud)," processing their images into grainy black-and-white abstractions. Tambellini's engagement with racial conflict was attenuated by his expansive notion of blackness. Not all of his black pieces address racial injustice, and those that do often equate blackness not only with African American self-determination but also with outer space and even, in his words, "the outer darkness and inner darkness of man."¹⁰⁶ Like Paik in his use of abstraction, Tambellini frequently abandoned direct reference in his black works, leaving the specifics of current events behind. In contrast, Dewey focused directly on black experience by examining in detail what had taken place the year before in Selma. Unlike the cathartic release of *Without & Within, Selma Last Year* unflinchingly confronted its audience with the strife of the civil rights movement.

In New York, Dewey met Bruce Davidson, who had also attended the march. Dewey was attracted to Davidson's photographs of the event because of their eloquence and range. Like Dewey's audio recordings, Davidson's images attempted to capture all sides of the event, and Dewey thought that they would complement his recordings. When Dewey learned that King was about to stage another civil rights campaign in Chicago, he decided to turn his tapes, accompanied by Davidson's photographs, into an expanded environment that would bolster King's campaign by reflecting on the events of the previous year in Selma. Dewey wanted the exhibition to serve as a means of considering the differences between the treatment of blacks in the rural South and the urban North. Timed to coincide with the one-year anniversary of the march, he secured the First Unitarian Church of Chicago as an opening venue for the exhibition and asked Riley to mix his tapes from the march into an audio collage. Dewey had a selection of Davidson's photographs blown up and hung them around the inside of the church. Mounted in wood frames that matched the pews, they were seamlessly integrated with the

space. In addition to the prints, dozens of slides of other photographs from the march by Davidson were projected against the church walls while Riley's remix of Dewey's tapes played. The space was filled with images and sound in a twenty-minute program. By plunging his viewers into a surrounding environmental collage, Dewey attempted to make them feel as if they were reliving the events in a more participatory way than would have been possible had they watched broadcast television's contemporaneous reflections on Selma. The photographs featured marchers, bystanders, and police alike. On the soundtrack, the ambient sound of helicopters overhead and shouts in the background mingled with people's observations of what they were seeing and their opinions on the unfolding events. Dewey let the bystanders and marchers speak for themselves in order to present contrasting, and even contradictory, accounts of Bloody Sunday. The exhibition was such a success that it went on tour to various sites around Chicago, including several community centers, a conference on human rights, and even a shopping mall.

Dewey recognized that bringing the exhibition to New York would significantly change its context, so he adapted the piece to the audience at Lincoln Center's film festival. In order to fit the exhibition in the allotted space, he set it up on two floors. Davidson's blown-up photographs were installed low to the ground on the entrance floor of Philharmonic Hall. As Dewey described them, they rose up from wedge-shaped bases "like tombstones."¹⁰⁷ The rest of the exhibition was on a lower floor, to which the viewer descended, entering a darkened maelstrom of projected images and sounds. Dewey used videotape equipment that he'd borrowed from Sony in conjunction with the slide projections and audio from the Chicago version of the installation. Upon reaching the lower floor, viewers were confronted with two monitors. Dewey looped footage from ABC's coverage of the Bloody Sunday police attacks on the first monitor so viewers could rewatch the events as they'd originally seen them broadcast in their living rooms. A closed-circuit image of the viewers appeared on the second monitor. This image was time-delayed by eight seconds, an effect Dewey achieved by adapting Riley's audiotape delay technique to videotape. Viewers approached to watch the horrific footage of the attacks, only to see themselves appear on the second monitor a few seconds later, looking at the first monitor. Participating live (or almost live) in the work itself, they suddenly had to choose between either watching the events of Bloody Sunday or watching themselves watching the events. Being caught between two images in an act of self-surveillance upset viewers.

While a number of other artists later worked with video-based time delay, none did so with such direct reference to contemporary politics. Through his use of video delay, Dewey hoped to reach the same level of explosive consciousness that he and Riley had previously generated with audio delay. Dewey said in an interview at the time that he wanted to “try and snag people on the fly and involve them . . . [to] catch them up with the place itself, and its values. Something immediate. Something of their own presence there at that time.”¹⁰⁸ Instead of abstracting the video image away from the political charge of current events, Dewey used closed-circuit surveillance to transport the audience at Lincoln Center directly back into the events that had unfolded the year before. He said that his use of this effect was the most successful part of the installation thanks to its ability to “create participation using feedback.”¹⁰⁹ The use of closed-circuit television caused viewers to feel as if they were being fed back into the same time and place as the events of Bloody Sunday, an even more immediately participatory form of feedback than that generated through typical television viewing. Like *usco* with its use of closed-circuit video projection, Dewey took McLuhan’s notion of corporate participation literally by transporting the bodies of audience members into the mediated space where the march was originally screened. Viewers participated by having their images included alongside the violence erupting in current events. He broke with the instantaneity of closed-circuit surveillance through his use of delay, which caused just enough of a gap to estrange viewers from their on-screen appearance. If viewers looked at themselves, they’d see themselves several seconds earlier, watching the other monitor. Becoming voyeurs of their own voyeurism, they were brought alongside the events of Bloody Sunday but kept at a distance, looking on from the sidelines. The largely white northern audience was forced to re-experience Bloody Sunday and the specter of racism it raised as most attendees had originally experienced it—at a mediated, televisual distance rather than through more direct involvement. Through Dewey’s use of closed-circuit television they were actively included in these events, not as hands-on participants but as passive television watchers. Dewey’s installation forced viewers to recognize the distance that television had imposed on the original events despite its immediacy and to ask themselves whether or not they’d lobbied for a change in race relations. It caused them to question their relation to the role television played as an intermediary in their lives and whether or not this had led them to passivity. Dewey brought his audience deeper into the events of Bloody

Sunday, only to render visible the spatiotemporal distances that mediated watching imposes between the public and events.

Dewey recounted that his use of television to create a critically disjunctive view of time and space made people uncomfortable and “very angry with themselves and angry with us.”¹¹⁰ He was pleased to have upset the pleasant night of cinemagoing that even supporters of avant-garde film had expected. He had, he said, taken the “familiar situation” of people mingling in the Philharmonic Hall lobby and transformed it so that the images he presented “would burn in,” echoing the violence of the original events.¹¹¹ By capturing their bodies on time-delayed video, he intertwined the physical effect of self-estrangement with the emotional affect of the previously televised images of mortified black bodies. Dewey forced the audience at Lincoln Center, which was viscerally moved, to confront its own relationship to racism. He said that his goal was “to articulate something of group concern. . . . This is why my work has moved to an exploration of problems related to group articulation.”¹¹² He designed his use of video in *Selma Last Year* to shock individual viewers from an affective experience of private television to one in which they would be forced to recognize their incorporation as a mass audience, sitting comfortably at home while they watched events like Bloody Sunday on the nightly news. He put viewers in the uncomfortable position of having to recognize their own complicity as watchers of these events by revealing that participation often meant as little as passive legitimation, especially in regards to events portrayed in the mass media. Rather than simply allow them to commune with the protestors, he obliged audience members to question their participation in the social concerns that were troubling the country as a whole and to ask whether they were indirectly supporting racism by not directly working against it. He wanted his viewers to ask themselves if they’d stood up, as a people, in solidarity with the marchers and taken action beyond watching or reading about the plight of others. For Dewey, a healthier people could only come through such processes of self-examination, even if these processes were difficult for viewers to bear.

►► While Nam June Paik may not have fully realized the type of participatory television he envisioned, in his essay “Expanded Education for the Paperless Society” he imagined what a world united by greater media participation would look like. In 1967 the Rockefeller Foundation awarded the

State University of New York, Stony Brook a grant of \$13,750 to “enable Paik to serve as consultant in communications research in its Instructional Resources Center.”¹¹³ He wrote “Expanded Education for the Paperless Society” for the foundation the following year as a report on the future of education in which he described a world where education would be dominated by an “instant global university.”¹¹⁴ Centered on a vast and readily accessible databank of stored videotapes, this proto-Internet would make paper publishing obsolete. Paik envisioned that its tapes would feature lectures and demonstrations by leading figures in many fields of inquiry. He bristled at the fact that so many great figures had gone unrecorded and called for the taping of luminaries such as Marcel Duchamp, Martin Heidegger, and Reinhold Niebuhr because they were living educational resources whose reach could be greatly extended by videotape distribution. He speculated that these electronic educational resources could also bridge cultures. Drawing on his background as a composer, he described an application of his system to music instruction and its potential cross-cultural benefits. He noted his own background as a person from “a minority nation in a minority continent” and wrote that during a time of war between the United States and Vietnam, “surely East–West communication is the biggest task of communications research [today].”¹¹⁵ Avoiding any direct reference to the war, Paik imagined a playful scenario in which a group of American music students would create a Gagaku orchestra by studying tapes of master Japanese musicians and then go on a surprise tour of Japan in authentic costumes. The result, he said, would be a “major cultural shock to the Japanese,” demonstrating the respect that Americans have for their traditions.¹¹⁶ In a text of 1970, “Global Groove and the Video Common Market,” he returned to this idea with a more direct discussion of Vietnam. He described Marshall McLuhan’s prophecy of a television-centric global village as “premature” and asked, “How can we teach about peace . . . [when] most Asian faces we encounter on the American TV screen are either miserable refugees, wretched prisoners or hated dictators?”¹¹⁷ He contrasted this with the situation in Asia, where Westerners were generally portrayed by foreign programming as members of happy, middle-class families. He speculated that this information gap may have contributed to the recent My Lai massacre, in which U.S. soldiers brutally killed a large number of unarmed civilians. Mentioning his earlier report, he suggested the building of a “video common market” that would function as a fluid image circulation system. Managed from below and maintained in the public interest, this market

would transform the public sphere into a place for the free play of images, helping quell the tides of global violence by promoting greater cross-cultural understanding through more equitable exchanges of information, and Paik called on American public television to lead in its development.

Paik's writing on expanded education was closely tied to Stan VanDerBeek's influential manifesto, *Culture: Intercom and Expanded Cinema*, which Paik almost certainly read. Paik and VanDerBeek crossed paths multiple times from the middle to late 1960s. In 1965 they collaborated on the film mentioned earlier in this volume, which was likely shown at the New Cinema Festival. Although they'd previously lived in New York, both found themselves in the Boston area during the late 1960s, when VanDerBeek was appointed artist-in-residence at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and then followed Paik as an artist-in-residence at WGBH. Written after he appeared at a conference with Marshall McLuhan in 1966, VanDerBeek's manifesto was published in several places, including Jonas Mekas's journal, *Film Culture*, which was widely read by avant-garde artists and filmmakers. At the same time as the New Cinema Festival, VanDerBeek was developing a "movie-drome," a movie theater in the round that he built in upstate New York from the top of a grain silo. He and a team of assistants simultaneously projected multiple films and slides over the interior of the dome while the audience lay on the ground and looked up at them, as if in a hippie planetarium. Like the work of USCO, the movie-drome was an instance of an artist's adaptation of electronic all-at-once-ness to three-dimensional space. His presentation at the New Cinema Festival, titled *Feedback*, was a simplified version of the more elaborate productions he was offering at the movie-drome.¹¹⁸

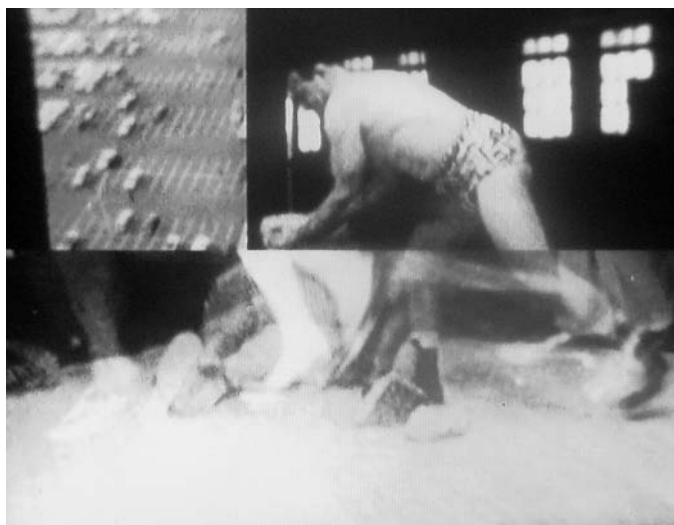
In his manifesto, VanDerBeek explicated the larger ramifications of his various experiments in expanded cinema. He put forward the idea of "culture-intercom," or the development of "a non-verbal, international picture-language . . . using fundamentally motion pictures."¹¹⁹ He thought this language, consisting of a collage-like flow of images and sounds, could act as a moving-image Esperanto, an "educational tool" to "reach for the emotional denominator of all men, the non-verbal basis of human life, thought and understanding, and to inspire all men to goodwill and 'inter- and intro-realization.'"¹²⁰ He described a future in which artists trained in intercom would develop high-density barrages of images screened in dromes around the world using video and computer technology. Connected by satellites,

these centers, much like Paik's instant global university, would contain vast stores of recorded information that could be used to create a "newsreel of ideas, of dreams, a movie-mural, a kinetic library, a culture decompression chamber, a culture-intercom."¹²¹ The communication system both Paik and VanDerBeek imagined would act as glue binding members of the global village more tightly together. Their forward thinking regarding the mass media offered an optimistically populist model of a networked future in which members of the public would engage in thoughtful, cross-cultural exchanges. But McLuhan himself noted that he was widely misunderstood regarding the positive effects of the global village. In an interview published in 1967, he said:

The more you create village conditions, the more discontinuity and division and diversity. The global village absolutely insures maximal disagreement on all points. It never occurred to me that uniformity and tranquility were the properties of the global village. . . . The tribal global village is far more divisive—and full of fighting—than any nationalism ever was. Village is fission not fusion. . . . The village is not the place to find ideal peace and harmony. Exact opposite. . . . I don't approve of the global village. I say we live in it.¹²²

While VanDerBeek, like Paik, certainly hoped culture-intercom would overcome this fission, he also recognized that antagonism informed the global village as much as communion did. VanDerBeek addressed the inability of the public to find peace in a world where violence continually circulated in the electronic mass media, though he hoped that the new forms of media flow he and his peers were developing would ultimately help overcome divisiveness.

VanDerBeek's engagement with mediated strife was particularly evident in two projects he undertook for broadcast television, *Panels for the Walls of the World* and *Violence Sonata*. Although best known for his seminal and award-winning collage films in which he pioneered the kind of image collage further developed in video art, he had been involved with television since the beginning of his career. In 1953, after studying at Black Mountain College, he wrote a script for a television melodrama about a destitute artist and a runaway girl called *Pretty as a Picture*. Although his program went unproduced, he ended up at CBS for a number of years in the mid-1950s. His work included a stint on the program *Winky Dink and You*, which allowed children to participate directly with the show's animated characters



Stan VanDerBeek, *Panels for the Walls of the World* (1967)

by drawing on a vinyl mat adhering to the face of the television screen. In 1966, hoping to secure a position as an artist-in-residence at CBS, he wrote a letter to the chairman of the board, William S. Paley. "I believe that motion pictures are the art of our time," he said, "and that television is the art of the future," a sentiment he expressed many times thereafter.¹²³ Although he never secured an official residency at CBS, the following year the network aired *Panels for the Walls of the World* as a segment on *Shots from the Underground*, a documentary about avant-garde film in the United States. The producers showcased VanDerBeek's approximately eight-minute-long black-and-white piece in full as an avant-garde artwork that took television as its medium. Aired three years before *The Medium Is the Medium*, it was a premiere work of broadcast video art. Because it was shown on commercial and not public television, it may very well have reached a wider audience. VanDerBeek saw *Panels for the Walls of the World* as an extension of his earlier collage films, referring to it alternately as "a movie-mural for TV," an "electric collage," and an "electric assemblage."¹²⁴ Given access to CBS's archive and free reign in its studio, he mixed six different inputs composed largely of old black-and-white news footage, unleashing a torrent of thematically related images whose rapidity far exceeded even that of images created by commercial television's typical fast editing.

Panels for the Walls of the World unites the dynamism of collage film, the archival materials of the compilation film, and the plasticity of studio-based video effects into a profusely segmented flow whose images pile up like a car crash. With no narration, VanDerBeek creates a discontinuous wreck of information, leaving viewers to extricate themselves. “The audience takes what it can or wants from the presentation and makes its own conclusions,” he said. “Each member of the audience will build his own references and realization from the image-flow.”¹²⁵ McLuhan and later commentators such as Raymond Williams recognized that commercial television broadcasting was based on a flow of images comprising fast cuts that rapidly switch between scenes, genre, and even content as they move between programs and advertising.¹²⁶ VanDerBeek drove headlong into this flow, which was rapidly becoming the inescapable language of the contemporary mass media. Despite the lack of master narration, and with all of its complexity, meaning still floats to the surface. VanDerBeek often chose images whose sources are suitably generic (e.g., military images, images of dancers) so that viewers don’t need to know the images’ origins in order to understand their recontextualization. Even if viewers fail to recognize the sources, his recombinations still manages to signify. Leitmotifs return, tying the whole together without need for narration. The mostly discontinuous soundtrack adds yet another layer to the mix that helps to contextualize the images, as sound and image move in and out of relation with each other. He uses television’s formal system of insets and wipes to create internal, on-screen panels that further signify through their juxtaposition.

VanDerBeek turns the original connotation of the images he appropriates toward an antiwar message. This message is designed to be consumed by an audience primed by a combination of fearmongering on the nightly news and the omnipotent adolescent fantasies fostered by Westerns and police dramas. Haunted by the possibility of nuclear annihilation, he equates Cold War posturing with mass entertainment, suggesting that in the nuclear age the threat of mutually ensured mass destruction is grounded as much in electronically transmitted spectacle as it is in actual nuclear weapons. The opening sequence of *Panels* sets the theme, acting as a preview for what follows. Recalling Walter Benjamin’s description of the angel of history, a man in a parachute is caught by a blast of wind and blown backward into the arms of the future with his eyes firmly fixed on the present.¹²⁷ Less than a second passes, and the object of his gaze appears when an image of a nuclear

bomb test is overlaid on his image. Cheers kick in on the soundtrack as the parachutist and bomb fade into Marilyn Monroe at a press conference. Almost as quickly as she appears, she begins to fade in and out of an image of dancers frenetically whirling around a stage to what could only be rock and roll music but with circus music ironically playing instead. The titles of the film appear as the screen is divided into three panels, two smaller ones on top and a larger one on the bottom, each with different images flashing through them. With this minute-long opening, VanDerBeek has established the piece's themes and formal operations. Throughout he uses a similarly rapid flow of images juxtaposed against each other and the soundtrack, giving the piece a restless, relentless momentum. With unprecedented access to television production facilities, he brings to bear nearly every trick then available in a commercial television studio, mixing the images using fades, inserts, and wipes, often simultaneously.

Subsequent images show body builders and dancers doing the twist in scanty outfits, martial parades demonstrating the military might on both sides of the Iron Curtain, and masses of spectators packed into stadiums, excitedly watching circuses and automobile races. The soundtrack is a mix of popular music and political rhetoric, including what sounds like Congress in session. Toward the end, the piece climaxes as its imagery becomes even more pointed. A series of nuclear-bomb tests erupt, mushroom clouds blossoming as houses are ripped to smithereens. These images are intercut with moving x-rays of human bodies, soldiers marching across desolate fields, and rioting crowds hemmed in by police. President Lyndon B. Johnson's voice is heard on the soundtrack saying, "This is the time for decision. You are the generation who must decide." The work's final image brackets its opening one. Several parachutists fall through the air, plummeting to earth like missiles. For these angels of history, a safe landing is uncertain. Through the profusion of images and sounds, VanDerBeek's message rings out clearly: in the global village, images of violence and actual violence are interconnected, adding fuel to the Cold War; while the spread of the electronic mass media might lead to greater international harmony, it can also lead to escalating discord.

VanDerBeek further plumbed the connections between virtual and actual violence in *Violence Sonata*, which he developed while he was an artist-in-residence at WGBH. Following several months after the broadcast of *The Medium Is the Medium*, *Violence Sonata* responds to Paik's *Electronic Opera No. 1* by adopting Paik's musical trope while attempting to construct a more

participatory broadcast work. VanDerBeek focused on the problem of race relations and mass-mediated representations of violence, creating one of the most ambitious works of early video art produced under the auspices of a television station. The main program, aired on January 12, 1970, from 9 to 10 PM, was a one-hour, two-channel broadcast that combined live studio acting and live-mixed video collage. It was followed by an additional half-hour “thrash-out,” based solely on audience participation in which the studio and home audience discussed the issues raised by the program. Unlike *Panels for the Walls of the World*, *Violence Sonata* features full, vibrant color and used chroma-keying, wipes, and the synthesized video throughout. It included direct input from home viewers, who were encouraged to call the station during the main broadcast and answer the question “Can man communicate?” In a parodic response to ratings and opinion polls, the home audience’s answers were tabulated and announced on the air; viewers overwhelmingly voted yes. A heated debate on the subject ensued during the thrash-out, with anger boiling over from the main program. The main program was sent out simultaneously in two complementary parts on both of WGBH’s channels, 2 (VHF) and 44 (UHF). The home audience was instructed to place two television sets side-by-side for tandem viewing, turning their living rooms into a small-scale videodrome.

VanDerBeek uses the doubling of images and sounds across both channels to great effect, amping up the level of the flow to a state of hyperstimulation with fast cuts and multiple images on both screens. He echoes footage from one channel to the other with wipes that seem to move across both screens. He also contrasts audio from one screen to the other. Quieter, less eventful sounds on one channel are complemented by louder, busier sounds on the other. Voices speak on one channel accompanied by abstract electronic music on the other. When voices come over both channels, they often seem to call back and forth. Channel 2 generally dominates, functioning as the primary, right-handed melody, with Channel 44 its secondary, left-handed counterpoint. VanDerBeek did this so that home viewers could watch Channel 2 alone without missing the general substance of the piece. The studio audience was subject to an additional set of events not seen on the television broadcast. Upon entering the theater, viewers were involuntarily fingerprinted. Before the start of the program, they saw a martial arts display and a man dressed as a soldier patrolling the stage with prop guns raised to the sound of gunfire and barking police dogs. During the live performances, the studio audience

could watch the actors on stage, as well as the home broadcast, which was shown on several large screens that were part of the scenography. The home audience saw a mix of the studio performances combined with found footage and material VanDerBeek had previously shot.

Violence Sonata begins with a scene in which a white man and a black man in masks recite texts about violence and discuss the ramifications of violence for society. They intone the program's refrain, "Violence is the digestive act of our inability to communicate," and then the viewer is plunged into the opening section through a fast-paced image flow addressing the mass media's use of violence as a form of entertainment. VanDerBeek contrasts this with footage from the studio of a group of children play-fighting who are joined by adults. They all begin yelling and laughing, therapeutically transforming the absorption of mass-mediated violence through play. The middle section features a dialogue, held live in the studio, between a black woman and white man lying intimately together in bed and arguing in the everyday way that couples do. As they discuss race relations, his comments are more idealistic than hers, expressing an attitude that the world should simply accept their relationship as he does. Her comments are pessimistic, expressing concern about their future together and squarely facing the difficulties of having mixed-race children. Eventually the camera pulls back to reveal that their bed is in a cage in the TV studio. They continue their conversation while other images related to violence and race relations interrupt their conversation, intruding on their intimacy.

Violence Sonata's last section is the longest and most structurally complex, and it brings the piece to a crescendo through its intensity. The two channels open with an interracial dialogue on violence. The masked men from the opening reappear. Their faces are superimposed as they read more statements about violence back and forth and ask each other questions. This gives way to a series of studio tableaus in which more masked men appear, their images distorted by video effects. Male dancers are trapped inside boxes whose exteriors are covered with texts about civil rights. This is contrasted on the other channel with a montage of movie and comic book heroes whose stereotypical masculinity seems to relate to the dancers' entrapment. Scenes of children playing in the studio switch to a video of a boy humorously discussing his own war movie, *Son of War*, which is mixed with images from Hollywood war movies and actual wartime footage. An in-studio scene appears of a man and woman sitting in separate living rooms, watching television. The man's

television screen bursts open. Unable to restrain the image flow, it spews forth a flood of streamers and confetti. Images of the children in the studio playing a toy fighting game appear. Fights among actors are staged live on one channel, with cuts to taped scenes of boxing matches accompanied by a voiceover discussing inner-city riots, while simultaneously a slapstick film of two fighting politicians appears on the other channel.

Violence Sonata decrescendos by returning to the two masked men from the beginning saying together: "We are on the verge of perishing. What does 'Burn, baby, burn' mean? It means 'Adapt, baby, adapt.' It means 'Learn, baby, learn.'" In the final scene a war game takes place in the studio with masked actors sitting around a table, fighting over a globe of the moon with a voiceover about war as a chessboard. This gives way to a close-up image of two hands struggling over a knifelike piece of glass set to a frenetic jazz drum solo. The other channel once again features the superimposition of the masked white men and black men that gives way to alternating shots of them unmasked. Finally showing their actual faces to each other and the audience, they conclude their dialogue, each speaking in turn: "I want to like you," "I want to love you," "I want you to like me," "I want you to love me." The final shot returns to the overlay of their faces while they chant, "Adapt or die."

By remarkable coincidence, the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence released a report on the state of violence in the United States on the same day as the broadcast of *Violence Sonata*. The commission, tasked with "searching for the causes of violence and the means of prevention," had been formed in 1968, in the wake of inner-city riots and the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy.¹²⁸ More than six hundred pages long, the report, titled *Mass Media and Violence*, discussed how representations of violence circulating in the mass media affected the national tenor. On VanDerBeek's own copy of the reviews of *Violence Sonata*, he noted that an article on the report was published in the *Boston Globe* on the same day that the newspaper covered his program. Like *Violence Sonata*, the report featured extensive discussions of the relationship between images of violence and acts of real violence, as well as the particular difficulties hampering communication between the black and white communities in the United States. The *Globe* review of the report focused on its conclusion, which called for "new and different voices to gain routine and peaceful access to the centralized news media."¹²⁹ Michael Rice, head of programming at WGBH, singled out the same quote in the station's newsletter, praising VanDerBeek

for being just such a voice for attempting to create a program that would enable the people to contribute their voices to the mass media. In contrast, the *Globe* review described *Violence Sonata* as too grounded in avant-garde “tricks” and opposed to deep inquiry into the nature and causes of violence, and criticized the discussion segment for its “vehemence” “combateness,” and “radicalism.”¹³⁰

For VanDerBeek, the heated discussion that took place at the thrash-out was precisely a mark of the program’s success. He wanted his program to trigger just such a participatory reckoning of the role that the mass media plays in circulating violent images and promoting racial conflict, even if this exchange itself took on violent overtones. This is why he referred to the discussion as a thrash-out and saw it as an integral part of the program rather than as a supplement. While the authors of the report on violence called for more voices to be aired, VanDerBeek was not simply airing these voices but having them engage in a discussion of the mass media using the media itself as a mediator. He succeeded in pushing his audience beyond passive viewing and into a passionate reflection on the media, staged from within the mass media. The modernist self-reflexivity of his main broadcast became even more politically charged with the inclusion of members of the public engaged in unscripted debate. The broadcast concluded with the very image of a people coalescing through dialogue on the influence of the mass media on the public sphere—hardly an avant-garde “trick.” VanDerBeek referred to *Violence Sonata* as a work of “post-television” and imagined it less as a discrete program than as an example of a new kind of expanded theatrical format that he and others could further develop to pursue the ideas he’d begun to explore with the movie-drome.¹³¹ He described the piece as “a media feed/back/forward sensory experience . . . a media wrap/rap around,” saying that his goal was to build even more participation into future iterations of the work.¹³² He wanted to produce a booklet on the topic of violence to be distributed to the audience, as well as a kit of materials that other stations could use to present their own versions of the work, adapting its format to the specific needs of their local viewers. The work was designed to grow and change with each presentation in an evolving collaboration between future producers and audiences. In a follow-up essay published after the broadcast, he referred to *Violence Sonata* as a work of “people’s-park TV.”¹³³ He wrote of his desire to transform television into a “new electronic community school/theater—a base for playing drama/trauma/learn/yearn/un-learning,” imagin-

ing a future for television in which the people would reclaim the airwaves just as the community in Berkeley was then doing on a derelict patch of land.¹³⁴

VanDerBeek's idea was grounded in a very different kind of populism than McLuhan's corporate participation. It grew out of the people's theater and its recent manifestations in the civil rights and free speech movements, with an emphasis on using the mass media as a stage. Rather than suggest that the people were united simply by watching and bonding over the affective pull of public events as seen in the mass media, VanDerBeek conceived of television as a platform that the public could reclaim and use for thrashing out issues of common concern. In response to critics who accused him of accentuating the already narcotizing effects of network flow, he said, "My concept is not one of media saturation but of communal integration in which all the media participate in a modern art form designed to represent the conflicts and relieve the problems of today's polis. Unlike the Greek city, ours are micro-macro structures in which urb interacts with orb, ghetto with globe, the media providing a new kind of stage or sounding-board."¹³⁵ Although the electronic global village might increase social strife, he thought this conflict could be rechanneled if fraught issues could be worked through with the mass media as a vehicle for positive social change. His model of media-based education was opposed to top-down stultification and envisioned a dynamic network of users producing and distributing their own media flows addressing issues of import to the communities in which they lived.

Not all reviewers were convinced that *Violence Sonata* had realized such lofty goals. One skeptic identified a deeper problem with VanDerBeek's use of avant-garde formal strategies: "If this was a sonata on violence, anyone who has watched the films or newscasts from Vietnam or the bloody campus riots could get a far more coherent account of the real thing."¹³⁶ While this was a valid criticism, it overlooked what the authors of the report on violence made clear: simply consuming more coherent footage of these events on the nightly news was as likely to inure the public to violence as it was to get them to work on eliminating its causes. While nightly newscasts might provide a small slice of coverage of these events, they had their own biases. *Violence Sonata* might not have offered historical first causes or even facts on the ground, but it captured the affect that imbued the flow of violence on television, which commercial newscasts kept at bay with the professional cool of the newscaster. There was also support for *Violence Sonata*. A more sympathetic critic commented, "What was really innovative was the artist's

attempt to involve the viewer . . . in beginning to channel this particular mass medium along more positive lines than expecting the weekly war movie from Vietnam.”¹³⁷ According to this writer, VanDerBeek brought images to the screen that countered the stereotypes currently abetting global unrest, thereby addressing on a deeper level the impact of mediated images of violence. *Violence Sonata* grappled with the effects of reducing racial unrest in the United States and the war in Vietnam on television to easily digested sound bites. As in the work of his peers, the density of his collage worked against the communicative efficiency of the arts of communication. The intensity of its flow forced viewers to either tune out or find new ways to conceptually and emotionally navigate the violence aired in discrete segments on network programming.

Violence Sonata was re-aired several times but edited down to a single channel, and without the thrash-out it lost its power. Rejecting the social consciousness of *Violence Sonata*, VanDerBeek developed his movie-drome into a cinema of dreams unironically designed to be passively absorbed while the audience slept through most of the program. The idea of recasting television as a form of “people’s-park tv” would be picked up by later groups of artists who would gradually leave multimedia performance behind and start working exclusively with technologies and experiences derived from television. For multiple reasons, Paik and VanDerBeek would turn away from the idea of developing systems for expanded electronic education. One reason was the limits of the technology itself. The medium simply couldn’t accommodate their ambitious ideas.¹³⁸ Another reason was that “participation” was too broad a term and needed further clarification. While work that focused on participation was significant because it raised the issue of how people engage with the mass media, not all kinds of participation necessarily lead to greater democracy. The result of a thrash-out on media violence might very well be more restrictions on broadcasting and less opportunity for grassroots media engagement, and, as Paik recognized, the audience might not want to participate in the ways these artists imagined. Even though these artists were outsiders to the television industry, they still imposed their artistic vision on the public from above, and their work was arguably as top-down as any industry production. Building on earlier projects by artists like Paik and VanDerBeek, the video collectives that followed created models of a bottom-up mass media that fostered democratic media participation based on giving direct voice to the public, a voice that the public itself was increasingly demanding.

CHAPTER TWO **TALKBACK**

►► In *Video Commune*, Nam June Paik asked his viewers to talk back to their television set by twiddling its knobs. Circa 1970, a younger generation of artists also began to consider how to build a more inclusively communal mass media by asking why the people couldn't talk back to their television sets even more directly. They took up the challenge presented in the national government's report on violence to allow "new and different voices to gain routine and peaceful access to the centralized news media" by creating alternative television networks that could air a broader range of public opinion.¹ Rather than attempt to liberate the public from the bondage of media control, they worked to establish alternative media networks in which members of the public could create and circulate their own media productions. Influenced by the movement for participatory democracy, they helped establish the notion that the public should have the right to mediate themselves. Portable videotape equipment had become more widely available by the late 1960s, and cable television was simultaneously expanding, making small-scale television programming possible for the first time. The combination of the two promised an era in which a less professionalized, broader-based people's television would flourish. Informed by a combination of the New Left's communalist spirit and the two financial incentives of group technology ownership and state funding, artists with a tendency toward media activism began banning together into video collectives and forging alternative networks of production, distribution, and consumption on the margins of the television industry.

Groups such as Raindance, the People's Video Theatre, the Videofreex, and the Women's Video News Service developed public-oriented forms of "talk-back," a technical term from the broadcasting industry that they redefined. Since the days of radio production, talkback systems had allowed producers to communicate with performers in the studio and vice versa while a show was in production. For the video collectives, talkback was a way of affording the people a greater public voice through television, which meant not only

representing a broader range of public opinion but also, more profoundly, transforming television from a one-way to a two-way street. Both at intimate screenings and on the airwaves themselves, they worked to make television a grassroots medium the public could use to thrash out important issues that mainstream television was ignoring, including questions about the industry itself. They blurred the lines between producers and consumers by including their audience in the system of media circulation as media producers as well as consumers. Rooted in dialogical relations, the video collectives created opportunities for members of the public to mediate their own differences, between themselves and with those in power.

The work of the video collectives was connected to the broader context of populist, left-wing television reform. In 1965, the year that consumer-grade portable video systems first became available in the United States, Harry J. Skornia published *Television and Society: An Inquest and Agenda for Improvement*. A colleague of Marshall McLuhan, Skornia wrote, “The long-term goal for television . . . is not greater restriction, but greater freedom. The objective is the liberation of broadcasting from the chains, taboos, and anachronistic practices which bind it, keeping it from realizing its full potential.” More a reformer than a radical, he called for the development of new means of “immediate feedback” that would recast television as a means of public expression from the bottom up, noting that this capability had long been suppressed by the commercial networks, despite its technical possibility.² “Two-way flow,” he claimed, was “needed to replace the authoritarian imposition of attitudes and values manufactured by the business community.”³ At the time, portable video systems weren’t in wide enough use for him to see their potential for talkback like the kind that the video collectives would develop, nor was cable television. Imagining the sophisticated systems that might be developed in the future, he argued, “By reservation of a few frequencies for the viewer and for feedback, the great dialogue which democracy requires is still possible.”⁴ He saw that one way to accomplish this would be to redesign the talkback systems that had long existed in the television industry. Skornia described experiments in which such systems allowed test audiences to interact with what they were watching in various ways and suggested these might become widely available one day if only the corporations who ran the networks had an incentive to further develop them.

Skornia was one of a long list of people who had called for television to give greater weight to public concerns since Herbert Hoover had proclaimed

in 1925, “The ether is a public medium, and its use must be for the public benefit.”⁵⁵ Public television was one result of this demand. The National Educational Television network began broadcasting during the 1950s, becoming the Public Broadcasting Service in 1970, which remains active today. The public television stations WGBH, WNET, and KQED were important supporters of early video art, and each ran its own programs featuring it. Public television was the one place on the air that attempted, in however small a way, to give the public greater access to the airwaves, although most of its programming, including its video art productions, still operated from above with little direct input from the audience.

Instead, the public’s voice was much more commonly expressed in relation to television through above method of ratings, which had become widespread in commercial television the United States by the end of the 1950s. In 1957 the sociologist Rolf B. Meyersohn criticized the networks for the mockery that ratings made of populism, writing that for the commercial television networks, “the only measure of success is ‘The Rating.’ In a kind of satire of the democratic process, the ‘people’ determine what their programs will be, how much they will cost advertisers, when they will be put on the air, and how much entertainers will be paid.”⁵⁶ Through ratings, the networks’ owners transformed the people’s voice into a revenue stream whose value lay in its statistical calculability and not its democratic potential.

In a 1961 talk entitled “Television and the Public Interest,” Newton Minow, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), famously decried network programming as a “vast wasteland.”⁵⁷ Like Hoover, he made these comments to an audience composed largely of leaders of the broadcasting industry. According to Minow, the lack of quality television programming was a deplorable situation because the government granted licenses to the commercial networks with the understanding that the airwaves were public property. He challenged these executives to stop aiming their programming at the lowest common denominator: “The public is your beneficiary. If you want to stay on as trustees, you must deliver a decent return to the public, not only to your stockholders.”⁵⁸ Claiming that the use of the airwaves was as important as the most pressing geopolitical matters, he rebuked his audience: “Just as history will decide whether the leaders of today’s world employed the atom to destroy the world or rebuild it for mankind’s benefit, so will history decide whether today’s broadcasters employed their powerful voice to enrich the people or debase them.”⁵⁹ Minow called on the networks to deploy

their powerful voice on behalf of the people but failed to acknowledge the people's own voice. He was still calling for top-down programming, only of a less stultifying sort.

The year after Minow delivered his well-publicized speech, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) leveled similar criticism against the broadcasting industry in its platform paper, "The Port Huron Statement." Unlike Minow, SDS took participatory democracy as its guiding principle and called for the public to take the lead in determining the use of the airwaves. SDS's statement spelled out their central aims: first, "that the individual share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life"; and second, "that society be organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation."¹⁰ Although SDS was speaking broadly of all communications mediums, there were a number of specific references to television in the statement, most notably in the call for television to be used for rational and full debate regarding issues of public policy, in contrast to finger-pointing or the reduction of serious matters to comedy. Years later, when the early video collectives were becoming active, former SDS president Todd Gitlin further addressed television's still unresolved shortcomings. In "Sixteen Notes on Television and the Movement" Gitlin continued SDS's earlier line of criticism, writing that for television in the United States "the commercial is the purpose, the essence; the program is package."¹¹ With television turned solely to profitmaking, he argued, the public was denied common participation in the mediation of events. Because television was licensed in the public interest, he thought that, at the very least, it should look out for public interests by acting as a member of the fourth estate in order to check the excesses of government and corporate power. Instead, he wrote, and despite Walter Cronkite's coverage of the war in Vietnam and other attempts at social reform, the commercial networks continually generated artificial consumer needs in order to keep profits flowing to the private sector. Any impulses toward social change that industry insiders might have were channeled into the reform of the existing system, including the system of television itself, rather than revolution. He pointed out that television's corporate, top-down structure was rarely if ever questioned by its owners or the talking heads who worked for them because it served them all so well and that no interrogations of the medium itself or its guiding assumptions ever appeared on the commercial or even public networks. Eloquently calling for a grassroots media populism in which industry control would be

relinquished in favor of new forms of mass-mediated community, he wrote: "A revolutionary movement must aim to transform mass media by liberating communications technology for popular use. Nationalization of the technology by itself does not solve the problem of access—who is to have it, and under what conditions. One-way communication must disappear and the producer–consumer relation be changed to a relation among communicators."¹² But Gitlin was vague about how to realize these ends financially or otherwise, noting only that "publics must be organized to demand systems with true feedback."¹³ He was only passingly familiar with the attempts at producing two-way television that were explored by the video collectives.

The media reformer most closely connected to the video collectives and talkback actually worked for the U.S. government. Nicholas Johnson was appointed as an FCC commissioner in 1966 and served through 1973. Despite working for the government, Johnson was sympathetic to the radical aspirations of the video collectives and even appeared in Raindance's *Media Primer*, as discussed later in this volume. Known as the Ralph Nader of the FCC, Johnson was also a lawyer turned political reformer whose opinions were profoundly threatening to corporate interests. A New Left–leaning liberal, Johnson tried to change the institutions of broadcasting from within by acting as a gadfly and unremittingly opposing Nixon's Republican appointees on the commission. During the late 1960s, Johnson published a series of essays on media reform that were collected in his 1970 book, *How to Talk Back to Your Television Set*. In it, Johnson denounced the commercial networks for preventing genuine public debate from taking place on airwaves that were ostensibly public property. He asserted that the networks perpetuated a variety of myths, particularly the myth that the station owners simply gave the people what they wanted. Rebutting the network double-speak that "the public interest is what interests the public," he noted that corporate interest is rarely if ever equivalent to public interest because corporations are required by the law to put shareholder profits first. Indicting the networks for their contribution to the human costs of the war in Vietnam, he asked rhetorically, "How much has television told you about the multibillion-dollar corporate profits from the war?"¹⁴ The networks were rarely if ever self-critical of the financial system that supported them or any other aspects of their own management, particularly on the air.

Discussing the future of television, Johnson wrote, "We have moved from an age when political and economic power were measured in land, or capital,

or labor, to an age in which power is measured largely by access to information and people.”¹⁵ Because it disseminates information on such a vast scale, television and the owners of its networks had become key players in this new age. By monopolizing access to the means of distribution and production, these networks were denying democratic freedom in relation to the electronic mass media by casting viewers in the role of consumers. Building on Skornia and others, Johnson made specific suggestions for improving television and its networks through various forms of talkback. He cited examples of ordinary people who had worked to change the corporate broadcasting system by legal means; among them were a lawyer who successfully lobbied to stop cigarette advertising on television and members of a black church who challenged a station’s license renewal on the grounds of systematic racial discrimination. Like Skornia, Johnson looked toward technology and a future where more sophisticated two-way talkback systems would be used. He envisioned a day when all people could become the producers of their own television programs or owners of their own networks, and would thereby be freed from the unidirectional communication of television as it was then being used.

In an article in *Rolling Stone*, which appeared just after the publication of his book, Johnson said, “Soon live video will be liberated from the monopoly of television. Soon you’ll have your own talk show. . . . Programming will no longer be a mystery delivered by a priestly handful. Everyone will produce his own show.”¹⁶ This statement was more radical than Andy Warhol’s comment that in the future everybody would be famous for fifteen minutes. Johnson was predicting that the people would have control over the means by which mass-mediated fame was produced. In *How to Talk Back to Your Television Set*, Johnson remarked that the desire for these changes was driven by “a revolution in participatory democracy” in the United States and around the world.¹⁷ He envisioned a future based on the values espoused by SDS regarding the people’s ability to participate more democratically in the mass media, noting that by the 1968 presidential campaign every candidate, of whatever political stripe, at least paid lip service to giving voice to the people. He believed fervently that, steered in the right direction, television could become just such a medium for common public participation. By the time Johnson was interviewed in *Rolling Stone*, he’d been in direct contact with the video collectives, who were making a significant contribution to the kinds of change he and other reformers had been calling for. As he acknowledged, these collectives were using portable video and cable television to transform the public

sphere into something closer to an expanded, two-way relationship between interconnected mass communicators. For the first time, nonprofessionals were readily able to conduct, however primitively, their own experiments with television and even make their own programs outside the constraints of the network television studios and their professional gatekeepers. Companies like Sony were marketing portable videotape systems as gadgets for making private home movies. The video collectives used these technologies and others to promote a vision of talkback that was predicated on the idea that media consumers could also be active producers and distributors of publically minded media projects.

►► First published in the summer of 1970, *Radical Software* epitomized the collective populist impulse that was beginning to inform early video art. Following in the wake of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, which had initially appeared several years earlier, *Radical Software* was a cross between a broadsheet, a spec sheet, and an academic journal.¹⁸ It quickly became one of the main platforms supporting the video collectives in their pursuit of alternative means of talkback. It had originally been conceived by the founding editors, Beryl Korot and Phyllis Gershuny, as a newsletter that would enable members of the emerging video art community to stay in touch with each other and keep up on the latest technological developments. After Korot and Gershuny allied themselves with Raindance, a collective of video makers founded in 1969 by Frank Gillette, Michael Shamberg, Louis Jaffe, and Marco Vassi, the journal's purview expanded to encompass the wider use of new technologies for social change while continuing to emphasize portable video systems and related tools.¹⁹ Raindance began in 1969 as an alternative to both left-wing technophobia and right-wing technophilia. The group chose its name (originally the Raindance Corporation and later changed to the Raindance Foundation after the organization achieved nonprofit status) in mock tribute to the Rand Corporation, a think tank notorious for its theory of mutually assured nuclear destruction and whose name was a contraction of "R&D." Formed as a countercultural think tank, Raindance also did research and development but from a left-wing perspective. Unlike other members of the New Left, Raindance worked against the military-industrial complex without eschewing technology, and *Radical Software* became an extension of this mission. Its first issue acknowledged the foundational work of earlier



Raindance, *Interview with Buckminster Fuller* (1970)

artists and theorists. It featured Paik's "Expanded Education for the Paperless Society," a report by VanDerBeek on his ongoing realizations of the movie-drome, and a transcription of a videotaped interview Raindance conducted with Buckminster Fuller in honor of the first Earth Day. These articles were accompanied by ones on the coming of cable television and video cassettes, both of which the editors thought would also offer greater public access to the mass media.

Published in two volumes from late 1970 through 1974, *Radical Software* offered extensive coverage of the video collectives throughout its run, including the editors' activities as well as those of the People's Video Theatre, Global Village, and the Videofreex. In its pages, a range of artists, philosophers, and visionaries espoused a decentered, community-based approach to the mass media that was often explicitly utopian. The journal's title came from a combination of the then-common understanding of the word "software" to mean "communication" and the quest for members of the collectives to create more radical means of interpersonal communication than the commercial mass media allowed. Its contributors repeatedly argued that the people should have increased access to information technologies and the ability to distribute information. The editors summed up their own ethos in the first issue's opening statement, cribbed almost exactly from *How to Talk Back to Your*

Television Set: "Power is no longer measured in land, labor, or capital, but by access to information and the means to disseminate it. As long as the most powerful tools (not weapons) are in the hands of those who would hoard them, no alternative cultural vision can succeed."²⁰ The transformation of television from a one-way street to a multidirectional information network would be a leitmotif in subsequent issues.

In contrast to the commercial networks' focus on capitalizing on information they privately controlled, the editors of and contributors to *Radical Software* espoused an egalitarian model in which information would freely circulate. Grounded in the populist attempt to construct "grassroots television" (as the back cover of the third issue proclaimed), the editors called for the people to control the circulation of mass-mediated information and not just be subject to whatever was broadcast. This was reinforced by their use of what they called a "Xerox mark," in opposition to a copyright mark, symbolized by an encircled "x" instead of a "c." More than a decade before copyleft or other types of intellectual property reform began in the 1980s, they wrote that their mark was "the antithesis of copyright, which means DO COPY."²¹ They were fighting against the propriety ownership of information by encouraging a culture of redistribution, reuse, and remixing that was directly tied to the work they were covering. The editors designed the journal as a platform to help further this work and the culture surrounding it by allowing grassroots producers to talk to each other as freely as possible and build their own interconnected network as a people's alternative to the mainstream media.

In addition to using the Xerox mark, *Radical Software* embodied the notion of populist media egalitarianism by incorporating a broader sense of collective information sharing into its structure. The editors frequently ceded control to its readers by allowing them to make significant contributions to the journal. Before the first issue was published, the editors solicited content from the burgeoning video art community. This information was compiled into an extensive "feedback" section highlighting contact information, project descriptions, and lists of videotapes available for sale or barter among the community. This coverage continued throughout the journal's run, creating an invaluable means of information sharing. Subsequent issues were partially or wholly guest-edited by members of the community. These special issues focused on regional activities in the United States and abroad and covered topics including the social environment of commercial television, video psy-

chotherapy, and the use of portable video with children. *Radical Software* was designed to serve as a vehicle for the video community to talk back to itself in print about what it was doing and to argue about issues of media reform.²²

The front cover of the first issue of *Radical Software* announced the birth of the “alternate television movement.” This movement would promote the kind of small-scale, noncorporate media that Nicholas Johnson foresaw operating in the public interest. Michael Shamberg reviewed *How to Talk Back to Your Television Set* in the first issue, writing positively of Johnson’s book but saying that Johnson should have called for more organized forms of resistance against the corporate ownership of the airwaves. Shamberg agreed that petitioning the license renewal boards was an important strategy but thought that a more crucial task was to allow those discontented with commercial television to build collective, grassroots networks.²³ One of *Radical Software*’s and Raindance’s most significant accomplishments was to help build just such an alternative information system through their support of the other collectives and artists who were developing video art and other new media projects. New York City, already home to the network television industry, was a center of this activity. Four of the most prominent collectives—Raindance, the People’s Video Theatre, Global Village, and the Videofreex—started there circa 1969, and many followed. These groups were featured in the pages of *Radical Software*. Along with the large number of artists and media producers in New York, the funds made available by the New York State Council on the Arts was another incentive for groups to form there. Like Johnson in the federal government, members of New York’s state government were sympathetic to the media reform movement as well as the arts, and considerable monetary support for early video art came from state funding.

The video collectives offered a model for working in television outside the commercial industry. They built an alternative system that promoted diversity by producing and distributing programs that the commercial networks were unable or unwilling to air and found spaces outside of the living room in which to show their work. Screenings, which consisted of footage that had just been shot and immediately played back, were held in lofts, in storefronts, and on the streets—settings that promoted debate in a public context, outside the privacy of one’s home. Their work was formally varied, moving from a collage and remix aesthetic to radical documentary practices developed in the wake of cinema vérité, often combining the two. The ultimate goal of

this work was to allow viewers to talk back to other people more directly on whatever topics they saw fit, using television as an intermediary. Education courses and collaborative programming were also an important part of these activities. A number of the collectives gave their audience members access to television production tools in order to help them become makers as well as consumers of television.

The very name of the People's Video Theatre signaled its populist bent. Ken Marsh, Elliot Glass, and Howard Gutstadt started the People's Video Theatre in 1969, developing one of the first full-scale production and reception spaces in the alternative television movement. Their goal, proclaimed Marsh at the end of an article that appeared in the second issue of *Radical Software*, was "all media to the people."²⁴ With very little money (around \$2,000), they built a facility that could screen videotapes, record and play back audience members, and teach viewers how to make their own tapes. They held screenings in their loft and frequently took their tapes, often shot in the streets, back into the streets for screenings. Marsh wrote that "the people are the information," recognizing the important role played by the circulation of notions ascribed to "the people" in the mass media and the need to give members of the public a greater say in the formation of public opinion using electronic mediums such as television.²⁵ Specializing in conflict resolution, one of their earliest projects focused on the redevelopment of Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village. They interviewed various people involved in the process, from government officials to park users of various backgrounds, who were often as hostile to each other as they were to the city officials for closing the park. The interviews were taped, edited together, and screened in public forums. Responses to the video and further discussions of the issues raised were taped at the screenings, which were edited back into the first cut so that the audience's input would feed back into the work itself. At the time, Marsh says, there were few if any man-on-the-street interviews on television news, and "people were awed by seeing themselves" on-screen talking about issues that mattered to them.²⁶

Forgoing the collage aesthetic that informed earlier video art and the work of some of the other collectives, the People's Video Theatre developed a template for "video verité" based on the challenges mounted by cinema verité to voice-of-god documentary filmmaking that had begun in the late 1950s. Video verité incorporated all of the techniques pioneered in cinema verité. Various names were used to describe this technique as it evolved in the United

States—Ricky Leacock called it “uncontrolled cinema”; Albert Maysles called it “direct cinema”; Robert Drew simply dismissed all previous documentary film styles as fake and this method as truer. By using newly available, lightweight, 16mm synchronized sound film cameras, these filmmakers were able to follow subjects around more easily than previous gear had allowed. Unburdened by their new equipment, the filmmakers felt as if they were stalking events like hunters and shot reels of footage, capturing history wherever and whenever it was taking place. Unlike documentary filmmakers, these directors did little or no pre-scripting or directing while shooting. The footage would be assembled into a story only later, in the editing room. The handheld camera heightened the somatic connection between the bodies captured on film, the body of the camera operator, and the body of the viewer. The slight shakiness of the image intensified the impact of the events on-screen, especially when the camera-person was running to chase down a scene. Directors avoided using talking heads or voiceovers, and viewers were left to piece together the events on their own, with little guidance beyond the subtleties of shooting and editing. In France, where Jean Rouch helped develop *cinéma vérité* in parallel with its American variants, directors often self-reflexively incorporated themselves into the documentary as part of the story. The People’s Video Theatre and other collectives frequently adopted this technique. By inserting themselves into the frame, directors were able to both narrate events and reflect on their own involvement in mediating the events they were capturing.

The new consumer-grade video systems that became widely available during the late 1960s offered a strong alternative to both 16mm film and the large, portable video rigs used by the television networks. Although the image and sound quality of consumer video was considerably worse than that of other systems, consumer video had the virtue of being relatively affordable and making it possible to instantly watch what was shot and record over it if it was unsuitable. This made it easy to capture discussions with members of the public and include them in the production in egalitarian ways. People could be shot anywhere and their images played back for their approval or further discussion. This allowed the collectives to give the on-the-street interviewee a direct say in how he or she would appear on-screen.

The People’s Video Theatre had only one monitor at its first loft screenings but quickly expanded that number to three, layering an element of multi-image collage into its *vérité* programming. It also incorporated a “Live-Forum,” in which audience members were taped in discussion with the video makers



People's Video Theatre, *Women's Liberation March NYC* (1970)

about what they had just watched and this footage was saved for possible inclusion in future screenings. The tapes made by members of the People's Video Theatre covered events that the mainstream news reported only briefly, if at all, capturing alternative content in greater depth than the networks did. Events they covered included marches for women's liberation and gay pride, and a Native American demonstration at Plymouth Rock against U.S. cultural imperialism. Just as Ken Dewey had done in *Selma Last Year*, they interviewed participants in these events as well as people watching from the sidelines, capturing opinions from all sides. Extending this practice, they conducted polls in the streets on hot-button issues of the day, and by taping audience members at screenings they added yet another level of talkback on current issues. Screening alternative video in a theatrical setting was a means of shifting the reception of television. Lofts became hybrid spaces that took the group togetherness of a theater or art gallery and combined it with the friendly affability of the domestic living room, although discussions at the theatre occasionally grew contentious. Centered on the kinds of dialogue necessary for participatory democracy, theatre members used portable video equipment in an attempt to build electronic town meetings for the Information Age, fostering the sort of participatory, democratic talkback commentators like Skornia and Johnson were calling for. Even if the quality

of the tapes they screened was too poor for commercial broadcasting, they were certainly good enough for community dialogue. Although wider distribution of their work was insignificant compared with the number of people reached by the nightly news, they were effecting change at a grassroots level. The People's Video Theatre was short-lived, lasting less than two years. The group splintered into several offshoots, including Woodstock Community Video, which conducted similar activities in the Woodstock, New York, region throughout the 1970s.

Raindance also sought to consolidate the production and distribution of tapes featuring stories that it perceived were being mis- or underrepresented by the commercial networks. Members made tapes that included footage of peace rallies and demonstrations, the music festivals at Woodstock and Altamont, the People's Park in Berkeley and its destruction, the moon landing as it was shown on television, and members of the Black Panther Party. Starting in December 1970, Raindance opened its loft for a ten-week screening program featuring its own work, as well as that of the People's Video Theatre, the Videofreex, and others. Like the People's Video Theatre, Raindance was attempting to alter the usual conditions of television watching. It screened short videos from the various collectives edited together to create a fast-paced collage of contemporary events, as if the nightly news had been co-opted by a band of unruly rabble-rousers. As reported in the pages of *Radical Software*, Raindance designed its screening space with comfortable, multilevel seating scattered throughout. Monitors all broadcasting the same program were arranged at different heights, pointing in different directions. Viewers could watch each other watching so that "people who had never met would rap with each other" and actively comment on the program being screened.²⁷ Made in the spirit of "ecologically sound, anticipatory design," Raindance's screening room stood in contrast to darkened movie theaters where no eye contact is made between viewers because all eyes are looking in the same direction in the dark and a hush prevails.²⁸ It also differed from domestic viewing because strangers interacted. Crossed sight lines inevitably led to eye contact, and the relaxed atmosphere to conversation. As at the People's Video Theatre's loft, collective, public viewing was rendered friendly, if not familial. Strangers came together in public as a television-watching people united not by a sporting event at a bar but by their shared interest in the counterculture and finding alternatives to corporate mass mediation.

Global Village held screenings and education programs out of its loft in

Soho that were much longer lived than those of either the People's Video Theatre or Raindance. Global Village was founded in 1969 by Rudi Stern, John Reilly, and Ira Schneider (who left a few months later to join Raindance). They built an enormous monitor bank on which they screened a multichannel, live-mixed program featuring music performed at Woodstock, President Nixon speaking on the war in Vietnam, the Black Panthers, student protests, and a couple having sex in a field. Psychedelic lights and slide projections accompanied these images. Global Village's original setup consisted of a bank of ten monitors, which grew to twelve even larger monitors when the group moved into a bigger space. Rather than play the same image on multiple channels, Global Village created multichannel mixes that generated collage effects similar to those found in the work of usco and Stan VanDerBeek. Responding to criticism that their earlier performances were too commercial, the opening event in the group's new space was a benefit screening of *The Battle of Algiers* to raise money for the Black Panther's Defense Fund. They performed a live remix of the film on the monitor bank, combining it with footage of "street scuffles [between] hard hats, students, [and the] police."²⁹ Like usco's installation at the World, Global Village's screening room was designed to ratchet up the flow of broadcast television in order to flood the audience's senses with an electronically generated excess of sights and sounds. Stern and Reilly wrote about their screenings, "What emerges is a matrix of politics, morals and [the] sounds of a generation."³⁰ They said that they designed their work to function as a "visual counterpart to the underground newspapers" that mobilized the "immediacy" of television to "trigger an overload" in the viewer.³¹ Although there was a tendency for their screenings to emulate the kind of enraptured narcosis produced in contemporaneous nightclubs, this was countered by the frequent presence of the video makers (generally Stern and Reilly), who would be available afterward for conversation. Occasionally the subjects of the tapes would also be present. Abbie Hoffman, who was the star of a number of underground tapes made by several of the collectives, was a frequent visitor and would occasionally discuss media politics as part of the screenings. While Raindance's screening room lasted only a few months, Global Village's screenings continued in various forms through the 1980s. It also ran a substantial educational program that trained members of the public to make their own experimental video documentaries and eventually collaborated with the New School for Social Research.

The Irish Tapes was one of the most accomplished video works to come



John Reilly and Stefan Moore, *The Irish Tapes* (1975)

from Global Village's early years. Starting in 1971 and completed in 1975, it was shot by Reilly and Stephan Moore primarily in Northern Ireland and was partially funded by the musician John Lennon, whose heritage was Irish and who deplored British colonialism. It captures the rising passion of the guerrilla war being fought by the Irish Republican Army against the British government. Although sympathetic to the IRA cause, the tape spends considerable time engaging with both sides of the conflict. It offers a harrowing look at the rising tide of violence, from the ruins of an IRA bomb attack on a luxury hotel to the barbed-wire-topped walls of Long Kesh prison. The final scene shows an older woman covering her bleeding face as a younger woman accompanying her screams at the cameraperson, "Look at this! That's what the British soldiers did! She was hit in the eyes." The woman beseeches the video makers, "Show her! Show her!" so that their tape can act as a witness to these events, her companion's bloody face talking back to the brutal power wielded by the British government.³² *The Irish Tapes* was originally shown at the Global Village loft in a two-channel version, screened on the monitor bank. A critic described the multichannel version as occupying "a gray area between art and journalism," a phrase that aptly describes much of the work produced by the collectives, which crossed readily between documentary exegesis and avant-garde experimentation.³³ Each channel was repeated in

checkerboard alternation on the monitor bank, playing against the other thematically. One sequence shows streets scenes that contrast the festive atmosphere of a Saint Patrick's Day Parade in the United States with street fighting in Northern Ireland. Although Riley recognized that the multichannel version had the potential to turn serious content into spectacle, he hoped that the juxtaposed images would enhance the work's power by allowing for spatial montage not typically available in a domestic setting. Wanting to reach a wider audience, he also edited *The Irish Tapes* into a single-channel version for distribution on television. But despite Lennon's support, because it lacked balance and was unflinchingly violent, it never screened on broadcast television, although it would eventually be shown on cable as well as at the Museum of Modern Art.

►► Taking a cue from the Black Panthers, the IRA, and other political dissidents, Michael Shamberg characterized the members of the video collectives as “guerrillas,” calling his own book on how to talk back to the commercial television industry *Guerrilla Television*.³⁴ Published in 1971, *Guerrilla Television* was originally meant to be the sixth and final issue of *Radical Software*.³⁵ In the book Shamberg encapsulates many of the ideas about the mass media that Raindance and the other collectives had been exploring over the previous several years and that he had begun developing in his earlier career as a reporter for *Time* magazine.³⁶ He concentrates on the problem of how to decentralize production and distribution, and the positive effects this will have on the mass media. He gives credit to Raindance member Paul Ryan for coming up with the term “guerrilla television,” admitting outright that though he's adopting it for the title of his book, his own notion of guerrilla warfare is “post-political” and opposed to the violence that characterizes conflicts like that in Northern Ireland.³⁷ Unlike contemporaneous left-wing guerrillas whose revolutionary activities the title of the book evokes, Shamberg casts the work of the video collectives in explicitly reformist terms. In a section titled “The Death of Politics,” he upholds Ralph Nader's call for political reform as a more productive form of political engagement.³⁸ Shamberg declares his opposition to “beast TV,” but supports grassroots decentralization and diversity, which gives the people greater access to production and distribution.³⁹ “As only people themselves ultimately know how they feel,” he writes, “they must have access to television tools without mediators.”⁴⁰

Despite his emphasis on reform over revolution, one option Shamberg supports for challenging beast TV is to hijack preexisting networks. The Yippies, who were masters of this tactic, regularly parodied the ruling class by capturing the attention of the media in pseudo-events whose absurdity could compete with that of any situation comedy. Their most infamous stunts included raining dollar bills down on the heads of traders at the New York Stock Exchange in 1967 and the nomination of Pigasus the pig for president at the Democratic National Convention in 1968. In *Guerrilla Television* Shamberg details a more direct attempt by the Yippies to wrest power from the mainstream media through an actual guerrilla takeover of the airwaves.⁴¹ In 1971 Yippies cofounder Jerry Rubin was invited to appear on the BBC television show *The Frost Programme* to discuss his recently published book *Do It! Scenarios of the Revolution*.⁴² Rubin gathered a cohort of twenty or so like-minded British media activists who sat in the audience. Rubin continually provoked Frost during the interview, eventually passing him a lit joint. When Frost nervously refused, the provocateurs in the audience rose up. Brandishing road flares and water pistols, they scattered flower petals over the other members of the audience and stormed the stage. Increasingly contentious debate ensued, and profanities were uttered live on the air. One of Rubin's cohort carried a portable video camera on stage, taping Frost and his cameramen while their media revolt was unfolding. The erstwhile rebels shot Frost with water from a toy pistol while simultaneously shooting him on videotape. The rebels held their portable camera up as a declaration to viewers that a bigger media revolution was taking place than this one disruption. Their small camera was evidence that the people could now mediate themselves, without the permission of mainstream broadcasting. The rebel footage shot during the show was sent to Raindance for inclusion in its loft screenings. In *Guerrilla Television* Shamberg expresses skepticism about the long-term effects of this kind of media takeover. He describes how mainstream media outlets quickly reframed the story in their favor, awarding Frost a victory by branding the erstwhile reformers a beastly mob. The press seized on the rebels' barbarism, portraying them as darkening the airwaves with foul language and adolescent behavior. Frost was lauded for keeping his cool and for being more rational than his opponents. While Shamberg isn't opposed to media hijacking, he ultimately takes Rubin to task for demagogically gaining more press for himself as a revolutionary celebrity than for truly forwarding the agenda of media reform.⁴³

Shamberg describes a number of other tactics in *Guerrilla Television* that he thinks will be more productive for television reform than directly commandeering commercial programs. He discusses the production of community video shown in and for the people originating the programming, as was already the case at screenings operated by the collectives. He also discusses programs designed for primary and secondary school students. In his review of *How to Talk Back to Your Television Set* in *Radical Software*, Shamberg criticizes the government for supporting the newly launched *Sesame Street* on public television, arguing that money would be much better spent on media education and programs designed to teach children to shoot their own videos. Remarkably, a significant number of these programs had come into being in the months between his review and the publication of *Guerrilla Television* where he describes them. Designed to counter the top-down model of broadcast educational television, these programs, including one developed by Raindance, allowed children to make their own television, thereby affording them a better understanding of the processes that lay behind the images they were so eagerly consuming in their leisure time.⁴⁴

Another tactic that Shamberg describes, one frequently practiced in the screening rooms, is the remixing of broadcast footage. Along with the ability to easily shoot outside the television studio, portable video systems made the recording of broadcast television programs by non-broadcasters possible for the first time. Their tape decks could be wired directly to a television set in order to record whatever was on the air. Remixing this footage allowed video makers to hijack the content of these programs, if not their actual site of production, which Shamberg suggests might be a more productive form of intervention. He describes using this footage to create “anti-ads” and “information collages,” and Raindance’s own series of tapes, which they called “media primers,” exemplify this approach.⁴⁵ These primers differed from Nam June Paik’s attempt to “transmute popular images beyond their popular meanings.” They dug deeper into the constructed nature of commercial television by analyzing its tropes and introducing perspectives it refused to air.

One of Raindance’s media primers begins with footage of its school program. It moves on to a mix of snippets from broadcast television, including President Nixon calling for peace in Vietnam, various political campaign advertisements, and material from the annual Jerry Lewis telethon for muscular dystrophy. These are then contrasted with longer and more numerous scenes of countercultural life shot by members of Raindance and shown



Nicolas Johnson in *Raindance*, *Media Primer* (1971)

sympathetically, without the negative bias or censorship usually found when network television dealt with similar subjects. Another primer contains footage in which various commentators from the alternative media movement critique the mainstream media. Early in the video, one of the producers of the Woodstock music festival describes the need to challenge “straight media.” He says, like Shamberg, that he wants reform and not revolution, which he thinks will be realized by speaking to straight people in a language they will understand. Another scene features several older white men, presumably academics, watching multiple television monitors on which the nightly news plays. They analyze the facial expressions of newscasters, describing how they reveal the broadcasters’ biases despite the supposed neutrality of their reportage. Turning to a campaign advertisement featuring Nelson Rockefeller, one notes the “kinesics of sincerity” in Rockefeller’s address as he strains to convince the viewer of his genuineness despite the fact that he’s talking to a camera. Nicholas Johnson makes several appearances, playing with a portable video system and speaking at a conference on television held by the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting. Thomas Hoving, then the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, had called the conference to address the fact that “the airwaves in the United States belong to the people, yet billions

of dollars each year accrue exclusively to the three major networks.”⁴⁶ At the conference Johnson calls for more responsibility in television news reporting. Later in the tape, Ken Marsh of the People’s Video Theatre stands at the podium and hands a portable video camera to Hoving. Marsh proclaims that, although the camera may look like a gun, portable video is a “weapon not for murdering each other but for carrying on dialogues.” Directly referencing Johnson, he states that the reason the portable video is such an effective tool for generating dialogue, especially as mobilized by collectives like the People’s Video Theatre and Raindance, is that, unlike network broadcasts, “it’s a two-way system. You can talk back to it.”

The centerpiece of the tape, to which it returns multiple times, is a campaign rally for James L. Buckley, the Conservative Party candidate who would be elected senator of New York in 1970. Shamberg and his team cover the rally, engaging members of the crowd in discussion. They have a long conversation with a woman who is especially eager to share her delight in Buckley’s imminent victory. Shamberg asks her whether she agrees with Vice President Spiro Agnew’s assessment that the mainstream press consists of “nattering nabobs of negativism” who refuse to report favorably on nonliberal causes.⁴⁷ She says that while she thinks the press has been giving more coverage to conservatives, since Agnew made his comments the only way people get on the news is by bombing something. Claiming her place in what President Nixon called the “great silent majority,” she says she and her conservative colleagues don’t make the news because they obey the law.⁴⁸ Shamberg replies that he thinks the Conservative Party *is* newsworthy, which is why he’s there, and that he’s attempting to give voice to people of all political persuasions by creating as balanced a vision as he can. Although balance is part of standard news practice, the women’s comments point to the fact that members of the right can feel just as excluded from the mainstream media as the left. By including her voice, Shamberg is attempting to give wider airing to people missing from public debates across the political spectrum. His vision of the people is radically inclusive and not limited to his compatriots on the left. After cutting to Marsh at the rally commenting about the power of talkback, the tape returns to Shamberg still in conversation with the woman. As a form of instant, participatory feedback she’s just watched the footage he’s shot of her. He asks her how she feels about seeing her own image on television, and she answers with embarrassment that,

while she thinks she sounds like Donald Duck, she enjoyed seeing herself on screen and is happy to be included in Raindance's production. Although she's not producing her own tape, because Shamberg has allowed her to see and approve the footage he shot he offers her a level of control over her own mass mediation never afforded the public by the commercial networks. Shamberg said in an interview at the time that, when using portable video, "we can play a tape back for people immediately. If they don't like it, we'll erase it."⁴⁹ Against journalistic protocol and contrary to the violent expropriation implied by "guerrilla television," Shamberg used the immediacy of portable video to allow the people he shot to become directly involved in the production of their own mediated image in the field. Working against the illusion of participation that man-on-the-street interviews foster, he gave his subjects a voice not only by taping what they said, but by allowing them to choose whether or not they would appear saying it.

Under the rubric "cybernetic strategies and services," the final tactic for media reform that Shamberg discusses in *Guerrilla Television* is the creation of a cultural databank linked to mobile media buses.⁵⁰ Adopting his discussion of the cultural databank from Nam June Paik and Stan VanDerBeek, he suggests that such systems could combine professionally produced materials with grassroots material like the media primers to construct "fluid . . . floating networks" driven by the interests of their participants "rather than forced advertising images."⁵¹ While Shamberg can see that the future of such systems lies in computing, to help build such a databank during the pre-digital era he imagines a host of media buses (and vans) driving across the country with production facilities in tow like Soviet era cinema trains. These media units would travel from town to town, sowing the seeds of alternative media by screening tapes and teaching people how to make their own contributions to the databank. The collectives were well on their way to building a shared databank of alternative content, and several, including the Videofreex and the West Coast video collective Ant Farm, were already experimenting with mobile units.⁵² Shamberg warns that without the spread of such independent media networks, "America will be the first culture to perish from misunderstanding the consequences of media ecology."⁵³ Although acting as mediators, the video collectives that took their acts on the road set off to nurture an alternative media ecology they hoped would flourish on its own and eventually break free of the clutches of so-called beast TV.

►► The collectives and other media reformers also hoped that cable television would become a wider venue for airing programming that was less beholden to mainstream interests. The second issue of *Radical Software* opened with a lengthy article on cable by Beryl Korot, and later issues featured detailed reports on the debates swirling around its regulation.⁵⁴ Circa 1970 cable had been used in the United States for more than a decade in communities that had little or no aerial reception either because they were too far away from broadcast antennas or because their reception was fraught with interference. Cable's larger bandwidth, with its potential for broader public access and two-way television, tantalized media reformers, although despite a few limited experiments, the latter potential would go unfulfilled. Cable was also enticing to commercial developers, who could see how profitable it would become. *Radical Software* offered extensive coverage of the ensuing struggle for control over cable that led to the legal mandate establishing public access channels, first in New York City in 1970 and then nationally in 1972.⁵⁵ While public access would become yet another outlet for early video art, particularly in New York, one collective left the city and started its own cable station.

The Videofreex used local cable television to develop some of the deepest roots of all the video collectives, realizing a vision of hyperlocal, grassroots programming in Lanesville, a rural community in upstate New York. The group came together after Parry Teasdale met David Cort while videotaping the Woodstock music festival. Teasdale moved in with Cort and Mary Curtis Ratcliff in New York City and formed the Videofreex, whose membership quickly expanded to include Davidson Gigliotti, Skip Blumberg, Ann Woodward, Carol Vontobel, Chuck Kennedy, Bart Friedman, and Nancy Cain. Invited to help develop a show for CBS focusing on the counterculture in 1969, members of the group traveled the country taping fellow freaks and left-wing activists wherever they found them. When CBS refused to air their footage because it was too radical in both form and content, the group moved upstate, where they undertook a number of projects. These included developing production facilities, which they opened to a wide variety of artists and underground media producers over the years, as well as a mobile version of these facilities installed in a touring media bus. They also began a television station of their own, which they built by connecting local farmhouses with unlicensed cable lines and an equally illicit transmitter. When they went



Videofreex, Excerpt from Lanesville TV (c. 1975)

on the air in 1972, the audience was so small that Teasdale referred to the station as a “micro-TV service.”⁵⁶ Calling their ad hoc network “Lanesville TV,” they broadcast on Channel 3, which was otherwise unused in the area. Initially they broadcast twice a week but quickly switched to once a week, airing on Saturdays from 7:00 PM until they ran out of things to say, which usually took about half an hour. The main show, *Greetings from Lanesville*, was a local news and variety program. It featured a segment for children called “The Buckaroo Bart Show” and a cooking segment called “Lanesville Country Kitchen.” Downplaying aspirations that the airwaves become a forum for radical public debate, the Videofreex provided the local community with the kinds of programming they were more interested in. According to Teasdale, one of the smartest political moves the group made upon arriving in Lanesville involved the local Rod and Gun Club, to which the town’s male elite belonged. In order to garner favor, *Greetings from Lanesville* gave the local pond restocking favorable coverage, placating local naysayers who might otherwise have frowned upon young, urban outsiders taking over the local airwaves.

Nancy Cain’s *Harriet*, from 1972, was one of the only explicitly political works shown on Lanesville TV and one of its few programs to have a life beyond its original broadcast. Capturing the spirit of second-wave feminism that was overflowing from the cities into more remote regions like Lanes-



Nancy Cain, *Harriet* (1972)

ville, *Harriet* is an avant-garde portrait of a housewife's escape fantasy. The video's titular star was a friend and neighbor of the Videofreex. She was working-class, like nearly everyone in Lanesville, and lived in a trailer with her husband and five children. She stayed at home, tending to the children and trailer while her husband was at work. Although Cain shot *Harriet* as a verité-style documentary, she edited it into a shifting plane of flashforwards and flashbacks, imbricating shots of Harriet doing her chores at home with her driving out of town, leaving her cares behind.

The program opens with Harriet at home, cooking, hanging laundry, yelling at the children, and watching a soap opera. Flashforwards show her in her car, leaving town, as if dreaming of a way out. Cain intercuts the domestic scenes with increasing frequency until the car scenes begin to predominate and the home scenes become flashbacks of a past life that she's finally managed to leave behind. Having escaped her domestic bondage, Harriet says gleefully, "No washing, no ironing, no cooking, nothing! I'm sick of Lanesville and I want to see something different. Goodbye, Lanesville. I've had seventeen years of it and that's enough." Laughing wildly, she says, "Goodbye, old life!" while the Dolly Parton song *Last Thing on My Mind* (about a woman leaving her man) plays on the radio.

After debuting on Lanesville TV, *Harriet* enjoyed frequent screenings at women's film and video festivals, becoming a classic work of early feminist video art. As originally broadcast in its local setting, *Harriet* challenged the

traditional values of Lanesville even more than later screenings did. Everyone knew Harriet in Lanesville, and she became a role model to some in town but anathema to others. With the exception of *Harriet*, whose political stance threatened members of the local community, Lanesville TV was genuinely welcoming and warmly inclusive of its audience. The Videofreex continuously invited local participation through live call-ins and roving interviews conducted with their “news buggy,” an old pram converted into a mobile video unit. Pushing the buggy down the town’s shady lanes, Bart Friedman corralled passersby into telling him the latest news.

In one memorable broadcast, he runs into a teenage boy who tells him that two calves have just been born. Another boy relates the story of a nonfatal car accident. A man discusses the problems a friend is having getting his pigs pregnant. These are the kinds of news events that matter to people in the community, passed back and forth in personal conversations and rarely shown on commercial television. The interaction between Friedman and the people he interviews is entirely conversational, as if he’s just strolling into town and running into friends who are filling him in on the latest gossip. He even admits on-air that while wandering he sometimes finds news and sometimes doesn’t, and if not so be it because no news is good news. In stark contrast to commercial television newscasters, he communicates with genuine affability with members of the community.

Because Lanesville TV was supported by grants and odd jobs, the Videofreex had no need to endlessly produce events in order to generate enough advertising revenue to stay on the air. There was no pressure to invent pseudo-events except for fun, as when the group aped Orson Welles’s *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast by faking a flying saucer abduction with excited commentary by locals. Lanesville TV’s programming was charming and far more inclusive of its local community than that of the commercial networks or even other types of public access cable.

One broadcast covering a local fire at an old wooden factory exemplified this. Skip Blumberg, the on-air host, appears live in the studio, which was actually a living room with big, overstuffed chairs. He sits with his visiting grandmother, who chats away, telling an off-screen visitor that she’s thrilled he came by because they have more than enough good food and dessert to share. Blumberg asks his audience to call in with messages like birthday greetings, special announcements, and notifications of lost dogs or houses for rent. The scene then cuts to a segment on a fire that volunteer firefighters

extinguished with the help of local teenagers. After the fire is out, the segment jumps to Blumberg juggling as he recounts the story and asks a fearful young boy if he'll still be afraid when the next fire happens. The boy replies, "I don't know. Probably I won't. Probably I will. Who knows, right?" The image then cuts back to the live studio, where Blumberg tells his grandmother about a firefighter who was injured putting out the blaze. His grandmother offers her best wishes to the fireman: "Get well fast. I guess we need you in this town." A man calls in and tells her on-air that he has a gift for her and is going to bring it right over. She says that she's delighted and that this has made her weekend complete.

Greetings from Lanesville avoided the artificial immediacy of television news by allowing a high degree of fluidity between its producers and consumers. Members of the local public could participate by presenting the news on location, by calling in, or by coming to the station and appearing live on the air. Lanesville TV succeeded because it transformed television into a truly populist medium. It allowed members of the local public to mediate themselves as much as they liked and covered topics that interested them. The local people wanted to know about livestock, and fires, and apartments for rent. These were the issues of concern that brought them together as a community. Far from radical in either Nam June Paik's or Michael Shamberg's sense, Lanesville TV managed to connect with its public through the populist reaffirmation of consensus and cohesion. Lanesville TV offered harmonious, people's-park TV without the thrash-out. Although the local community didn't own the means of production, the Videofreex were open to working with the residents and helping to fulfill their needs. Once, a person called in to angrily complain that she was trying to watch *All in the Family* and that Lanesville TV was interfering with her reception. When no one else called in to demand that they stay on the air, the Videofreex signed off for the night, allowing the caller to watch the more polished entertainment offered by the commercial networks. The people had talked back—or at least one member of the public had—asking the group to silence their broadcast and they politely complied. This was an unusual request. *Greetings from Lanesville* was generally well received by the local community and was frequently watched over the competing commercial fare. Over time, the members of the Videofreex went from being outsider transplants to members of the Lanesville community. Lanesville TV stayed on the air weekly for five years, for well over two hundred broadcasts, and several members of the Videofreex settled in the area permanently.

►► At the same time that the Videofreex were doing their local community work, Top Value Television (TVTV) was analyzing the artifice and lack of depth of commercial television's coverage of public events. After the publication of *Guerrilla Television*, Shamberg left Raindance to start TVTV in 1972 with Allan Rucker in order to cover the presidential primary conventions that year in Miami. They recruited sympathetic friends, including Skip Blumberg of the Videofreex, and traveled to the conventions as one of the few video teams unaffiliated with a commercial network. Shamberg and Rucker formed TVTV as an alternative news service whose aim was to produce television documentaries that would challenge the practices of commercial broadcasting. Using cable as a distribution platform, they told stories that were often more focused on how events were presented by the commercial networks than on the events themselves. They were interested in the failure of the mainstream news to reflect on its own framing of events. This was especially true of their first two features, which they produced at the conventions: *The World's Largest TV Studio*, on the Democratic convention, which ran from July 10 to 13, 1972, and *Four More Years*, on the Republican convention, from August 21 to 23. TVTV arranged for a coalition of cable channels to pre-buy both programs, which optioned the right to first broadcast and provided funding. After their successful debut on cable, the two programs were edited into a single, hour-long feature that was shown on several commercial stations around the country. Considerable anxiety was building in the lead up to the 1972 conventions because of the riots at the 1968 Democratic convention, but they ended up being relatively quiet affairs. The Democratic convention was dramatic only because of the close race between Hubert Humphrey, who lost, and George McGovern, who eventually won the nomination. For the Republicans, Nixon's nomination was a foregone conclusion. The most dramatic events at the GOP convention took place outside the convention hall, where antiwar protests were held, although none with the ferocity of the Days of Rage.

This wasn't the first time a primary race had been recorded in so much detail for television. Drew Associates (with Robert Drew, Ricky Leacock, Albert Maysles, and D. A. Pennebaker) made the cinema verité documentary *Primary* during Humphrey's and John F. Kennedy's race for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination in 1960. Although they shot it for ABC, the network balked at airing it because of its radical structure. With only two minutes of narration in an hour-long program, viewers were left to piece

together the events on their own. Network executives told Drew that the tape looked like raw footage and that the audience wouldn't be able to follow what was happening without a master narrator. Because Drew refused to change the film, it ended up playing in movie theaters rather than on television. Using a similar format shot on videotape, TVTV was able to air its programs because it cut a distribution deal with the cable stations whose standards were looser. After *The World's Largest TV Studio* and *Four More Years* played on cable, they were picked up for network broadcasting as well, becoming some of the earliest works of alternative documentary video to reach a significant audience outside of the loft scene. Shooting verité style, with portable, handheld video cameras, TVTV created a sense of energy that made viewers feel present on the floor of the conventions. In both programs, TVTV revealed its own production process by filming the video makers themselves as they captured the unfolding events at the conventions and talked to each other about the process of capturing these events. By self-reflexively revealing how the news was constructed, they showed home viewers, at least in part, what was involved in reporting the events. Rather than position viewers as flies on the wall, TVTV included them in the action as if they were members of the crew. This revelation of process was both an inclusive gesture made to the audience and a meta-reflection on television news as a genre that shapes the public sphere. The group exposed the construction of the news by calling attention to the ways television frames unfolding historical events. The video makers presented themselves in the act of recording, and thereby affecting, these events while simultaneously having conversations with the network reporters on their own coverage of, and effect on, the same events.

The title of the first tape, *The World's Largest TV Studio*, acknowledges that nominating conventions had become little more than pseudo-events designed for media coverage. TVTV explicitly situated itself in opposition to the commercial television networks' reporting on the conventions. One of the opening chapters in *The World's Largest TV Studio*, titled "Tooling Up," shows technicians setting up the convention center as a makeshift studio. Workers construct sets, test monitors for the live editing required for broadcasting, and hang banners. The sequence ends with a videographer from ABC shown weighed down by a "portable" video rig that envelops him while a group of technicians swarm around, adjusting it. A TVTV camera operator deftly circles the more professional cameraperson. Demonstrating the grace made possible by its considerably lighter gear, TVTV implies that the counterculture



TVTV, *The World's Largest TV Studio* (1972)

is less burdened, both literally and figuratively, than the establishment. A scene from *Four More Years* reiterates this. Skip Blumberg asks CBS's Mike Wallace if he'd like to produce news using a looser format, presumably more like that used by TVTV, or even do advocacy reporting. Wallace responds stodgily that he wouldn't do anything differently. Meanwhile a second TVTV camera operator appears behind Wallace, clearly in the frame. The image cuts to the view from this camera, which looks over Wallace's shoulder at Blumberg as if with a wink. The image then cuts back to the first camera while the second camera operator effortlessly strides off to cover something else. The viewer is given the sense that the mainstream networks' coverage is inevitably stilted because they are burdened by outmoded thinking as much as by outmoded technology.

A later scene in *The World's Largest TV Studio* shows Blumberg on the convention floor in conversation with Shamberg. As Shamberg shoots him, they reflect on TVTV's process:

BLUMBERG: Usually there's a lot more happening than the main action. And we put ourselves into the scene too . . . If we're there . . . we're changing the scene.

SHAMBERG: It's like you're participating.

BLUMBERG: Everybody there is part of the event.

Unlike the mainstream networks, TVTV never purports to be neutral. It explicitly acknowledges that its presence at the event shapes the event and that denying the influence of the mass media on anything it covers is disingenuous. The conversation between Shamberg and Blumberg segues into Shamberg's interview with a reporter for *Newsweek*. She peppers him with questions that he deftly answers. While he's suddenly become the object of mass media scrutiny, all the while TVTV is taping the interview. Shamberg describes to the reporter some of the tactics that TVTV is developing against beast TV. He says that because of the size of their equipment and the cost of production, the mainstream networks turn their cameras on only when something's happening. Because of the portability of TVTV's cameras and low shooting costs, it can keep its cameras on all the time, capturing what's happening behind the scenes. Shamberg's claim is embodied in TVTV's tape, which shows a behind-the-scenes look at the production of a national news article. "In place of the mass media," Shamberg says to the reporter, "we need a special-purpose media where everybody can express their own views and there's enough space for everybody." He adds that cable television, in combination with portable video, is a system already in place for "personalized media," implicitly acknowledging the suitability of TVTV's programs for just this kind of use. For Shamberg, personalized media didn't mean target advertising and niche marketing. It meant smaller-scale programming with more focused content than that found on lowest-common-denominator-skewed commercial media. The tape flashes forward to the published *Newsweek* article, which is read by a TVTV member. Not surprisingly, the reporter ignores Shamberg's comments. Completely misquoting him, she focuses instead on TVTV as a group of pot-smoking hippies getting high in backrooms while the serious journalists are on the floor covering the actual events. This couldn't be further from the truth.⁵⁷ *The World's Largest Television Studio's* reporting of the specifics of governmental procedure is far more detailed than that of any of the commercial networks, standing in stark contrast to the typically superficial mainstream news coverage. Much of the tape focuses on a complicated scheme to stop the derailing of McGovern's nomination. The labyrinthine details of this plot are tracked through a behind-the-scenes look at the attempt to unseat Chicago Mayor's Richard Daley, the state representative from Illinois, who was using every trick he could to elect Humphrey. In its close examination of this one incident, the tape gives a portrait of the micropolitics of the convention.

TVTV weaves a variety of other events through *The World's Largest TV Station*, including further moments of self-reflexive meditation on the production of network news. These feature interviews with anchors from the various broadcast networks. Douglas Kiker defends the accuracy of the reporting of the mainstream media. Dan Rather says that he gets excited about the conventions because they always make “a hell of a good story.” Walter Cronkite appears on a monitor at second hand, having been taped earlier by TVTV. Unlike Wallace, he validates TVTV’s work, speaking favorably about its production of more open-ended programs and suggesting that its method allows things to be said that can’t be said in the more structured formats of the commercial networks. A similar sequence of interviews with news anchors appears in *Four More Years*. While *The World's Largest TV Station* swings between examining the constructed nature of the convention and revealing a behind-the-scenes look at the minutiae of democratic politics, *Four More Years* is almost wholly focused on the former. It reveals the attempt by the Republicans to put on as seamless a pseudo-event as possible. Given that Nixon was guaranteed the nomination, the only controversial aspect of the convention was its very artificiality. A long opening sequence establishes the convention’s artifice with a behind-the-scenes look at the coaching of various groups of mostly young Nixon supporters and the canned, pre-scripted nature of their self-presentation. All of the news anchors bemoan this. Cassie Mackin, the first woman to cover a convention on behalf of a national news team, sums up this sentiment by describing the convention as “very dull . . . it’s a very packaged, plastic kind of thing, with very little spontaneity.” Kiker, more dogged, says that there is always a story, but implies that not much is going on. This is confirmed as the video cuts to news producer Tom Petat, who says, “What’s happening here? Mainly entertainment—a kind of scene-setting show put on by the Republicans.” Wallace says, while smirking because he knows he’s making an understatement, that he has yet to find a story, because the convention has been “a little” dull. At the end of his interview Wallace even admits, now openly smiling, that he’d rather be watching at home than wasting his time covering it.

Cronkite makes another, longer appearance in *Four More Years*. He once again voices his support for TVTV and says that people shouldn’t get all their news from one source, let alone one television broadcast. “We can’t cover the news in an evening, in a half-hour. That’s ridiculous!” he says, acknowledging the need for alternatives. Blumberg asks him if feedback from his



Four More Years (1972)

viewers affects his reporting. Cronkite replies that he likes to think there's no effect, but there must be some because he's only human. Alluding to his opposition to the war in Vietnam, he describes the public pressure that has been mounted against some of his reporting and the self-doubt it has led to, but he concludes that it is important for a journalist to ignore this kind of influence. Cronkite doesn't realize that he and Blumberg are speaking at cross-purposes, however. When Blumberg asked him about viewer feedback, Blumberg was thinking of a positive reciprocity between reporters and their audience, a clear goal of TVTV and of alternative television in general. During its coverage of the conventions, TVTV played back for its subjects as much of the footage of them as possible in order to win their confidence and support. Building this rapport was especially important when TVTV reached out to cover the right. Although reporting from the left, in *Four More Years* TVTV gives a number of subjects with different political views a chance to reflect on their own mass mediation. The scene with Cronkite cuts to a group of Republican youth reading newspaper coverage of themselves, which, one angrily says, makes them sound as if they're part of a "propaganda mill." The tape concludes with scenes that are even unfriendly to the left, showing left-wing protestors outside the convention hall who are threatening the convention-goers to such an extent that a security guard beseeches a troop of

Girl Scouts to run as quickly as possible into the convention before they get hurt. The tape ends with Ron Kovic sneaking into the convention. Kovic, a former Marine who was paralyzed in Vietnam, had become a leading activist against the war (and the eventual subject of Oliver Stone's film *Born on the Fourth of July*). Just after Nixon is nominated at the convention, Kovic and his compatriots can be heard from the back of the convention hall yelling, "Stop the bombing! Stop killing! Stop the war!" Looking out at the audience through TVTV's camera, Kovic calls out to the viewers as well to "stop killing human beings." Kovic's image cuts to the Republicans ecstatically chanting "four more years, four more years, four more years," also for the camera. In addition to giving equal time to both sides, TVTV shows how both play to the camera alike. The battle for airtime presses in on all sides, engulfing all the players at the convention and reducing governmental politics to an ongoing cycle of mass-mediated hype and counterhype.

►► Feminism barely registered in the pages of *Radical Software*, despite the fact that two women founded it, that a number of other women contributed to it, and that second-wave feminism was well under way during the years that it was published. While hints of the video works being produced in the context of feminism were scattered in ads and listings, it was otherwise given no coverage. Regardless of *Radical Software's* blind spot, a significant collective spirit informed early feminist video art, and feminism was an important context in which video-based talkback flourished. A number of women who were members of the video collectives made explicitly feminist work. Nancy Cain's *Harriet* became one of Lanesville TV's most widely rescreened segments, and other feminist works were made by women who were part of the Videofreex; among the latter were Cain and Carol Vontobel's *Sybil*, in which a mock everywoman blithely discusses her ignorance of feminism, and Cain and Mary Curtis Ratcliff's *Curtis' Abortion*, in which they discuss the step-by-step process of terminating an unwanted pregnancy. Julie Gustafson, who was first a student and eventually a codirector of Global Village, also made several videos that have been recognized as landmarks of feminist video art.

During the 1970s, the Kitchen held an ongoing series of women's video festivals, which became the premiere venue for collective feminist video work and for video artwork by women in general.⁵⁸ The consciousness-raising

groups that had become an integral part of the women's movement were one of the main touchstones for feminist video artists as they moved beyond individual problems to identify larger structural factors that reinforced oppression beyond individual struggles. One of the key goals of early feminist video art was to connect private, individual concerns with those of broader public import by shifting issues ascribed to the private sphere into the public sphere, as famously captured by the title of Carol Hanisch's groundbreaking 1970 essay, "The Personal Is Political."⁵⁹ Feminist video artists challenged both male and female viewers' assumptions regarding women's capabilities by confronting them with women's oppression. Their work built solidarity among sympathetic viewers and stirred debate about the status of women and their representation in the mass media, particularly on television. They raised issues like the suitability of certain topics for public broadcast, the ability of women to work in male-dominated fields such as the television industry, and the gender stereotypes that circulate in the mass media.

When the Kitchen opened in June 1971, it was yet another loftlike screening space feeding the growing appetite for video art. It occupied the former kitchen of an old theater in New York City that had recently been converted into the Mercer Arts Center, which was quickly becoming downtown's premiere venue for avant-garde electronic art. The Kitchen was under the direction of Steina and Woody Vasulka, who showed their own work and that of other emerging video artists. They encouraged audience participation by holding an open screening every Wednesday night where anyone could show her or his work and get feedback on it. In June 1972 the Kitchen held its first video festival, a month-long series of screenings featuring the Vasulkas' work along with that of Nam June Paik, Stan VanDerBeek, Global Village, and a number of others.⁶⁰ While the Kitchen's festival was taking place, the First International Women's Film Festival was running in New York. The Women's Film Festival was a watershed event designed as a rebuke to the film industry, which, like the television industry, allowed women to work in front of the camera but rarely behind it. By 1972 a large number of women were making video art as well as films. Steina was distressed by the lack of women at the Kitchen's video festival and decided to organize the first Women's Video Festival. Rather than organize it herself, she asked Shridhar Bapat, who had organized the previous video festival, and Susan Milano, who worked with Global Village, to do so. They sent letters to more than sixty women invit-

ing them to submit tapes, about twenty of whom responded. In the spirit of democratic participation fostered by the Wednesday night open screenings, all of the tapes submitted were shown with no jurying.

The Women's Video Festival opened just two months after the Kitchen's previous festival, running from September 14 to September 30. It generously allowed visitors to pay what they could and included an open screening of additional work by women in the usual Wednesday slot. Bapat and Milano reported to participants in a letter written afterward that they considered the festival a great success.⁶¹ Between forty and sixty people attended on most nights, a good number for the Kitchen at the time. Due to popular demand, they extended the festival an additional weekend and screened selections from the previous two weeks as well as several late submissions. The festival was repeated throughout the 1970s, growing larger, more elaborate, and better attended with each iteration. In the press release for the first festival, the organizers succinctly described why so many women were working with portable video: "Half-inch experimental video is new and exciting, both as art medium and information tool. Unlike more established media, it lacks a traditional male-dominated structure."⁶² Milano later expanded on this point in the program notes for the fourth festival, held in 1976.⁶³ Reflecting on the festival's history, she pointedly wrote that there continued to be a need for woman-focused events because, in spite of the fact that women made up a majority of the U.S. population, they were sorely underrepresented in the workplace, particularly in the film and television industries. Jobs in media production had long been closed to most women because the pressure to raise a family and leave the workplace prevented them from entering the field to begin with, because they hit a glass ceiling and were unable to rise above the level of secretary or script girl, or because overt sexism blocked their entry to highly skilled manual work like cinematography. Portable video technology enabled women to affordably produce and shoot their own moving-image works outside the constraints of the commercial film and television industries. While a significant number of women were making videotapes and video installations, there were few opportunities for them to screen their work. The festival provided just such an opportunity.

The first Women's Video Festival opened with Steina's tape *Let It Be* (1972), which had recently won top prize in the "Conceptual Art" category at the first National Video Festival, held in August in Minneapolis. Although she

would become better known for less overtly political work, this early piece was directly linked to feminist concerns. As the tape opens, Steina appears with violin in hand, seeming to play along with the Beatles' current hit, "Let It Be." The camera quickly zooms in to an ultra-tight close-up of her mouth, which fills the screen as she lip-syncs the song's lyrics. As she exaggerates the movement of her lips, her teeth become bestial. The lyrics to the song describe the dissolution of the Beatles and of 1960s idealism. Reinterpreted by Steina, the phrase "let it be" becomes a challenge, even a threat, to the passive letting go advocated by the song. When lip-synced so ferociously by a woman, the lines about the nun "Mother Mary" comforting a young, idealistic man clash with the role in which women had long been cast as helpmates and nursemaids. While mimicking male pop stardom, Steina refuses to be reduced to the secondary status to which women are often assigned both inside and outside the entertainment industry. The intensity of her attempt to sing along refutes the lyric's resignation. Through a feral gnashing of teeth, she claims agency as a cultural producer by transforming the song's sentimentality into an act of defiance.

Although it won a prize as a work of conceptual art, in its content as well as its form *Let It Be* confused the easy distinction between avant-garde experimentation and activist documentary. Like other work by the video collectives, the videos shown at the Women's Video Festival tread the boundaries between the two. On the festival's opening night, several works were screened on an eight-monitor matrix. Milano notes that the focus in much of the work shown, whether leaning more toward conceptual or documentary modes, was on consciousness-raising. In fact, the screenings at the festival occasionally turned into consciousness-raising groups when audience members stayed afterward to discuss the relevance of the tapes to their own lives and to the women's movement.

The Rape Tape by the Under One Roof video collective was one of the works that garnered the most attention during the festival. It shows four women sitting together in a room, sharing their experiences of being raped. When one speaks, another holds the camera. The participants are the tapes' producers, each taking turns as both speaker and camera operator. They directly address each other through the camera, thereby directly and empathetically addressing the viewer. The stories they tell are harrowing but leavened with gallows humor—one woman recounts being advised that reporting her rape by a white man would be good for civil rights because it would demonstrate that not all



Steina, *Let It Be* (1972)

rapists were black. A review of the video festival in *Off Our Backs* describes the “freshness and intensity” of seeing women publicly discuss rape, and the subtlety and insight of their self-analysis: “The entire audience was stunned and sensitized by the tape.”⁶⁴ *The Rape Tape* transforms consciousness-raising, usually held in private, into an act of public exposure. Portable video facilitated its construction because the camera was light enough to be handed between group members. The viewer is situated in the place of one of the group members, cycling through the eyes of each woman as both watcher and storyteller, a technique that heightens the viewer’s identification with the members of the group. The viewer becomes witness to each woman’s story. The women’s discussion breaks with the passive acceptance of rape as a private issue, one for which women often blame themselves or are blamed for in court. By publicly using the word “rape” to name the sexual acts they were forced to undergo, each woman claims wider political significance for her assault and for the fact that these weren’t sexual affairs gone wrong but criminal acts that society must collectively work to prevent for the public good. They talk back against the notion that they were at fault for their attacks, recognizing them as a problem in which the public as a whole has a stake.

Darcy Umstadter screened her videotape *The Worst Is Over* on the same night as *The Rape Tape*. Umstadter drew its name from the paternalistic

words doctors say to women after they've undergone a traumatic procedure like an abortion. She transforms these words into a rallying cry, calling for an end to illegal abortion. Far more graphic than *Curtis' Abortion, The Worst Is Over* is a videotape of the video maker's own abortion. At every turn, she undermines expectations about how a woman will behave under such difficult circumstances. Before the procedure, she and the nurse discuss the role men play in pregnancy. When the nurse speaks critically of so many men's lack of responsibility, Umstadter defends her male partner, saying that he's "more upset than she is about the abortion." She plays it cool, readying herself for the procedure with an air of detachment. Directing from the operating table, she establishes camera angles with several assistants before the taping begins, and she overdubs the abortion itself with Mahler. Afterward she shows herself vomiting but quickly pulls herself together. Her cool restored, she asks the doctor if she can see the remains of the fetus. With a calculated detachment that counters the image of women as hysterics, she publicly reveals a practice that at the time was often shamefully undertaken, with the utmost secrecy, in illicit backrooms. Despite the fact that *Roe v. Wade* was making its way through the courts and that several states had legalized abortion, even talking about having an abortion remained taboo. Umstadter bravely put her reputation on the line in order to demonstrate that a legally performed abortion is a simple medical procedure that should never endanger a woman's life. By exposing her body in the midst of an extremely vulnerable moment as she directed its recording on video, she took control of a potentially fraught personal situation to craft a public representation of a procedure whose privacy she felt was unconscionable because it led to unnecessary trauma and death.

Made in the wake of the first festival, Julie Gustafson's *Politics of Intimacy* (1972) also challenged the boundaries of public speech by focusing on women's sexuality and the right of women to control their own bodies. Gustafson belonged to a consciousness-raising group in Massachusetts before moving to New York and joining Global Village, an experience of great significance to her.⁶⁵ In *The Politics of Intimacy*, she turned to issues related to women's sexual pleasure that had been given scant public attention during the late 1950s and early 1960s when she was raised. She recognized that the sexual revolution, which had begun in the early 1960s, was all too often a revolution in name only because it focused on male sexual pleasure and continued to ignore women's sexuality. On the coattails of the sexual revolution, pornography and less explicit modes of sexual licentiousness had become commonplace



Dr. Mary Jane Sherfey in Julie Gustafson, *The Politics of Intimacy* (1972)

in cinema and even on television, and women were omnipresent in the mass media as sexual beings, but mostly as one-dimensional objects of male desire. In *The Politics of Intimacy* Gustafson set out to correct such biases by featuring interviews with ten women on the details of their sex lives; the women included her mother, one of her sisters, friends (one of whom had been in her consciousness-raising group), as well as strangers of various ages, races, and sexual orientations. She intercut these personal accounts with scientific commentary by Dr. Mary Jane Sherfey, a psychiatrist and author of *The Nature and Evolution of Female Sexuality*, which was the first technically detailed account of the function of women's sex organs that focused more on orgasm than on reproduction.⁶⁶

Shot almost entirely in close-up, often extreme close-up, *The Politics of Intimacy* is as stylistically intimate as the topics being discussed. Gustafson exclusively uses the talking head, adopting a look that is closer to that of live television than of film. Through sustained, intimate conversation with a generally unacknowledged off-screen interlocutor, the women on-screen seem to be conversing directly with the viewer, as if they were television hosts than rather the subjects of a documentary film. The speakers communicate directly with the viewer, heightening the sense of sympathetic communion between viewer and viewed. Unlike classical Hollywood cinema, in which

scopophilic pleasure typically depends upon identification with the point of view of a male hero, live television frequently addresses its audience in an I/you relationship that leaves the identity of the viewer relatively intact. The impact of this direct address is heightened by the illusion of immediacy that television fosters. Instead of mapping themselves onto the body of an on-screen stand-in, television viewers identify with television presenters as if they were speaking directly to them. Because Gustafson's subjects share intimate details about their lives, their use of direct address creates a sense of public intimacy that was uncommon in either film or television. This was all the more unusual because, during the 1950s and 1960s, television presenters were strictly white, male, and heteronormative, a monopoly that Gustafson and other feminist film and video makers were challenging. The women's faces in *The Politics of Intimacy* look very different from the neutral mask of a typical male television presenter. Because of Gustafson's use of the close-up, every expression of sorrow or joy, every word struggled over or enthusiastically expressed is visible on their faces, further increasing the viewer's empathetic identification.⁶⁷

The Politics of Intimacy is subtitled *Ten Women Talk about Orgasm and Sexuality*, and the women interviewed are remarkably frank about their personal sexual experiences, even though they know full well that the tape is destined for public viewing. Gustafson screened what she had recorded for all of her subjects, generally right after taping them, getting their feedback and permission so that they would feel safe about her representation of the most intimate details of their private lives. These weren't subjects discussed in polite company, let alone in public, although television programs such as the *Phil Donahue Show*, which started broadcasting nationally in 1970, were beginning to challenge these taboos. The women discuss in explicit terms what it feels like to have an orgasm, and most highlight the pleasure they experience during sex. One woman has never had an orgasm. She worries about her normalcy, recounting how her inability to achieve orgasm has led to difficulties in her relationships with men. The women discuss the power they have over men when they use their sexuality to arouse them. One of the women who identifies herself as a lesbian says that there is no way a woman can have a nonsexist relationship with a man; even if a man wants to be nonsexist, society simply doesn't support that sort of masculinity. The next woman to appear, although interviewed separately, confirms this when she says she puts her husband's sexuality before her own. The women discuss the

widely varied things they find sexy. One particularly ebullient interviewee describes her favorite sex play, which involves acting out rape scenes in which she encourages her male partner to “really let loose.” Because of the pleasure she clearly takes in this and the glee with which she discusses it, she seems less like a victim replaying her own oppression than someone who has reclaimed it. The tape concludes with the women describing their often difficult attempts to build feelings of self-love in relation to their sexuality because of the social pressure to feel shame about sex.

Dr. Sherfey appears throughout the tape, presenting a clinical counterpoint to the women’s personal stories. In early sections, she discusses the repression of women’s sexuality throughout history and the role of women as chattel. In later parts, she describes in great medical detail the inherent ability of all women to have multiple clitoral orgasms. Countering the image of the male doctor, Sherfey embodies the august voice of female authority. She asserts that women can be masters of their own bodies and discusses sexuality in a direct and clinical way. As an older woman, she demonstrates that women of any age can be interested in, and can celebrate, sexuality. As a whole, *The Politics of Intimacy* offers a chorus of opinions on women’s sexuality, creating a plurivocal portrait of a taboo subject. Although Gustafson was optimistic that it would be widely distributed, it was barely seen. It played several times in Europe, but its scheduled airing on Manhattan cable television was canceled because of the tape’s controversial content.⁶⁸ Apparently, real women’s sexuality was too fraught a topic even for cable’s relatively loose standards. Sherfey had hoped that the tape could be distributed for educational use, but it never was, though it remains in distribution today.

Another Look (at the Miami Convention) by the Women’s Video News Service (wvns) is one of the most significant, if almost entirely forgotten, feminist video works to directly address media populism. It captures the spirit of collective activism that informed both grassroots video production and second-wave feminism. Like *The World’s Largest TV Studio*, it covers the 1972 Democratic convention, offering a parallel view of the same events but from an entirely different perspective—that of people marginalized by mainstream politics. In examining the role of women, people of color, and local Miami residents who aren’t part of any official political machine, wvns spotlights those whose voices are inadequately represented in the public sphere.

Another Look was the first all-woman broadcast television production. The lawyer and civil rights advocate Flo Kennedy produced it, and it was



The Women's Video News Service, *Another Look* (at the Miami Convention) (1972)

made by a group of video makers consisting of Kleckner, Wendy Appel, Pat de Pew, Mary Feldbauer, Caroline Kreski, and Rita Ogden, with help from a number of other women, including Jody Sibert, who was also a member of Raindance. They raised money by pre-selling the program to cable television in a deal similar to TVTV's. It was originally shown as "a work in progress" at the first Women's Video Festival. wvns member Susan Kleckner had previously shown rough cuts of the video at the Kitchen's Wednesday night opening screenings and put together a more finished version just in time for the festival. The final version was screened at the second Women's Video Festival in 1973. Thereafter, it was screened once on Manhattan cable television and once at the Whitney Museum of American Art before disappearing from view.

Another Look begins with a scene of the videotape makers sitting around in a hotel room before the convention, reading over the contract they've signed with Kennedy. For Kleckner, this scene is a crucial beginning because it reveals the economic process that underwrote the tape's production. Both Kleckner and Appel agree that the appearance throughout *Another Look* of the women who made the tape is one of its most significant contributions to feminist documentary practices. wvns conscientiously depicted itself as

consisting of women who were capable of handling all aspects of video production, from contract negotiation to postproduction. Showing themselves on-camera as an all-woman crew was in itself a political statement.⁶⁹

While Cassie Mackin is often credited as the first women television reporter to appear on the floor of a national political convention, the women in WVNS were also there, as were the women who worked with TVTV. The absurdity of women being excluded from reporting television (let alone producing it) is noted in *The World's Largest Television Studio* when TVTV's Maureen Orth interviews Mackin. Mackin says that the job of reporting from the floor is "a piece of cake . . . there's nothing to this that a woman couldn't have done a long time ago!" The appearance of women reporters on the convention floor coincided with the emergence of women on the national political stage. In the wake of the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1970, a number of well-known women's rights activists, including Kennedy, Gloria Steinem, Bella Abzug, and Shirley Chisholm, organized the National Women's Political Caucus. The caucus had successfully lobbied for the inclusion of more women delegates in both primary conventions, doubling the previous number at the Republican convention and tripling the number at the Democratic convention. They supported Chisholm's nomination for president, making her the first black person, and only the second women, to run for president on a major party platform. They also nearly succeeded in nominating Sissy Farenthold as the vice-presidential candidate. But except for the brief interview with Mackin, TVTV ignored the increased presence of women at the conventions, as did the mainstream press.⁷⁰ The mission of WVNS was to offer an alternative even to TVTV's alternative view of the convention by focusing on the effect that people who had traditionally been political outsiders, including themselves, were having on democratic governance.

Another Look moves between goings-on in the convention hall and related peripheral events, including those staged in a people's park set up outside the convention hall, as well as various hotels in the area where a variety of speakers and their constituents gathered. Its first half focuses on events that took place before the convention officially began. At a meeting held by the Women's Political Caucus, Sissy Farenthold is seen speaking about women's status as a minority despite their actual demographic majority. In a fierier tone, Betty Friedan proclaims that from now on women are going to make

policy, not coffee. Back at the park, two black women discuss what it means to be a pro-black woman. A Native American speaker addresses an audience in the park on indigenous rights and feminism. Two other black women discuss the solidarity between black women and lesbians because of their double marginalization, even among feminists, and one calls for more lesbians to take their place in the women's rights movement. They are followed by a group of women, including Gloria Steinem and Flo Kennedy, crammed together in a room singing a song whose chorus is "I'm tired of fuckers fucking over me." Claudia Weill—one of the few women at the time who was a professional camera operator and was an inspiration for Kleckner—can be seen shooting in the background. A number of other scenes are captured in the park: interviews are conducted with the many black residents of Miami who have gathered there and who all express support for Chisholm; women discuss the need to overthrow the U.S. government or at least oust Nixon in order to create conditions more conducive to social equity; and yet another semiobscene sing-along ensues, led by Len Chandler to his song "My Ass Is Mine," a rebuttal of the U.S. Army's proclamation to unruly soldiers that "your ass is mine." The first half of the tape concludes with a shot of the audience singing and the sound of their voices joyously aligned in populist protest.

An entr'acte that relies heavily on avant-garde techniques reveals more of the tape's production process. In a flashforward, the video makers are seen in the editing studio. They present themselves as a group of empowered producers, in charge of the final construction of the images they shot. The camera zooms into the editing screen, causing video feedback to appear and then dissolve into an array of special effects. The voices of the women can be heard debating various edits, while the images undergo further manipulation. This section ends with a brief synthesized image of the U.S. flag set to the sound of the Pledge of Allegiance being recited by a group of people at the convention. Electronically abstracted away from its proper form, the flag is transformed into a symbol of the need for another, more inclusive vision of American democracy built by the people who have been excluded from public discourse.

The second half of the tape begins with the opening of the convention and the official world of Democratic politics. The footage of the convention captured by *wvns* significantly differs even from that captured by *TVTV*, let alone the mainstream networks. *Another Look* depicts events that are completely absent from other coverage, airing a wider swath of public opinion

than mainstream or alternative television. Abzug gives a speech in which she assuages male fears, saying that the women at the convention are more than happy to share power with men and other political minorities alike. WVNS interviews an ultraconservative woman who says that women shouldn't work at all, a sentiment heartily seconded by the man accompanying her. Another woman expresses her indifference to the participation of women in politics. The tape then pointedly cuts to a woman doing sound recording as part of another television crew, who says that she can't get a job working as a cameraperson despite her ability to run a professional camera. Brief interviews with other women at the convention follow, as does a feminist protest at a fashion show held in conjunction with the convention. There is footage of an informal roundtable on the role of women in the mass media and the importance of alternative media for disseminating other points of view. At the roundtable, Kleckner discusses the need to involve more women in news reporting. Nanette Rainone speaks about her work at WBAI, where she spearheaded some of the earliest radio programs to focus on women's issues, including "Womankind" and "Consciousness-Raising on the Air." Other women discuss how difficult it has been gaining access to jobs in the mainstream media. The video makers also include scenes of themselves reflecting on these events while watching the tapes they've just shot. Not only do they offer an image of consciousness-raising as a process of collective debate and discussion, they include themselves in the debate as active participations rather than disinterested observers. The tape concludes with scenes of the video makers editing the footage.

Another Look helped give political others, both inside and outside the system, a voice in the mass media, and it did so by presenting an image of women producing the tape itself as a platform for empowered talkback. It offered a model of informed, political metacommentary made in the spirit of media populism. *Off Our Backs'* review of the festival singles out the scenes in *Another Look* that show the women working together, as producers of the tape.⁷¹ This was quite a change from the usual news reporting of the time, which had virtually no women reporters other than Mackin. Appel finds *Another Look* important for similar reasons. For her, the tape's specific coverage of the events of the convention matters less than its portrayal of "women using tools."⁷² These images talked back to the world, and to the mainstream media industry in particular, by demonstrating that women could produce television as readily as any man. This reflection on the role of

women in public life, especially in wvns's own coverage of public life, was designed to raise the consciousness of those who thought women should be excluded from particular kinds of work, or even from working altogether. Despite its continued obscurity, *Another Look* is an essential document that demonstrates that "the people" isn't given but is formed through a process of debate and dialogue. The anger and sincerity of its depiction of this process defy the presentation of the conventions either as pseudo-events, as found in mainstream television coverage, or even as meta-events, as found in TVTV's second-order coverage. With a spirit of hopeful antagonism, it shows the building of solidarity among marginalized people who were working collectively to shift the grounds of public discourse. wvns was lobbying on behalf of others who had been relegated to the sidelines of public life. *Another Look* irrefutably demonstrates that similar kinds of oppression are found in party politics and the mass media, and that the time has come to work on reforming both. Although the reasons it was never broadcast remain obscure, it is distinctly possible that this message was too controversial for the networks that paid for the program to air it.

Continuing throughout the 1970s, the Women's Video Festival became one of the most important venues where feminist video art was seen. Although not exclusively focused on collective production, it exemplified the populist impulse that informed the other early video collectives in its building of a grassroots community of discourse where television was used to talk back against injustice and normative constructions of subjectivity. The talkback found in early video art helped expose the political underpinnings of identity construction. In its diversity, it presented more varied and fluid forms of mediated identity at both the collective and individual levels than found in mainstream media networks. By the early 1970s, feminists were leading the way toward bringing about a revolution within the revolution sparked by the civil rights movement. Along with addressing the New Left's unacknowledged sexism, racism, classism, and biases against nonheterosexual orientations, authors like Michele Wallace and Barbara Smith argued that identity was multilayered and irreducible to the influential stereotypes that circulated even within alternative communities.⁷³ While there were still biases in even the most overtly political works of feminist video art, such work revealed a greater range of identities than those found in the cliché-ridden programming of the commercial mass media, where a figure as important as Lucille Ball rose to power only by portraying a ditzzy housewife and where politics was typically

reduced to the party wrangling of Democrats versus Republicans. *Another Look* stands as the epitome of this work. It captured both a wider array of identities than those covered even by the alternative press and exposed the limits of the mediated identities currently in circulation, particularly those of women. Perhaps most importantly it suggested to other women that they too could go out and make their own video works.

Rather than arguing vaguely for more audience participation, the video collectives developed alternative uses of television where talk that the industry found impertinent or inappropriate could circulate. Their work transformed television into a means of lobbying for social change. The collectives epitomized Todd Gitlin's hope that "the producer-consumer relation be changed to a relation among communicators."⁷⁴ The collectives cast viewers into the role of media populists working actively on the more equitable construction of the public sphere by reclaiming the mass media for their own uses. At events like the festival and in the hands of the video collectives, mass communication became the basis of participatory community-building, whether from viewing based on group solidarity or more hands-on forms of group consumption, distribution, and production. Later projects by DCTV, Paper Tiger Television, and others continued the work of the early video collectives, whose radical inclusiveness of their audience as part of a community of equals was unparalleled before digital broadcasting and became a model for media activists to follow.⁷⁵ The notion that anyone might circulate her or his own version of current events was fundamental to the work done by the collectives. They developed this notion in the hope that a greater diversity of public opinion in the mass media would lead to stronger overall social cohesion by giving voice to those who had previously been voiceless and by strengthening the mass media as a fourth estate. Although mediated, the talkback supported by the collectives looked beyond the screen, toward solidarity grounded in face-to-face interaction. The screen was seen not as an end in itself but as a means for building nonvirtual connections in real life.

CHAPTER THREE

VIDEO ECOLOGIES

►► Although ecology is the study of organisms and their environments and not just the study of earth science, in the context of the art world it has often been associated with earthworks. In accounts of postminimalism and the art of the 1960s and 1970s, its other associations have frequently been overlooked in favor of phenomenology, semiotics, and institutional critique.¹ During this time, a number of artists, including Les Levine, Frank Gillette, Juan Downey, Dan Graham, and Vito Acconci, made works that examined the ways that television forms ecological networks whose conventions shape not only the content screened but also the sense of self and group identity of the people who produce and consume this content. These works were made in the wake of the multimedia installations of the 1960s and in parallel with the more overtly activist work of the video collectives, by some of the same artists. Acknowledging that the emerging electronic environment was shaping the public in unprecedented ways, these artists used closed-circuit television to evoke a posthumanist subjectivity in which the people were not so much masters of technology as a part of larger technosocial structures incorporating organisms and technologies. Instead of striving to give the people greater voice in the mass media, these projects drew on the emerging field of media ecology to explore how a medium like television creates an environment that structures both a sense of one's self and the sense of being-in-common necessary for community.

When education professor Neil Postman introduced the term “media ecology” in 1968, he was defining a prospective academic field that would combine aspects of anthropology, sociology, and the visual analysis of popular culture. He described its purview as follows:

Media ecology looks into the matter of how media of communication affect human perception, understanding, feeling, and value; and how our interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chance of survival. The

word ecology implies the study of environments: their structure, content and impact on people. An environment is, after all, a complex message system which imposes on human beings certain ways of thinking, feeling and behaving. It structures what we can see, say and therefore do. It assigns roles and insists on our playing them. It specifies what we are permitted and not permitted to do. . . . Media ecology tries to make these specifications explicit.²

As Postman describes, media ecology examines the intersection between the people who make up communities and their shared means of communication. By attempting to read community through the lens of communication, media ecologists work to expose the common ground produced by the techniques and technologies that mediate subjectivity or the sense one has of the difference between self and other, whether that other is another being, an object, or part of a shared environment. Although this means examining language, unlike linguists, media ecologists focused on the physical structures shaping communication and their interrelationship with the people who use them, particularly mass mediums from the earliest forms of print to the most recent developments in electronics. Postman founded a graduate program in media ecology at New York University in 1971. Its course of study emphasized systemic structures over individual subjectivity or technologies. Citing as precursors Norbert Wiener, Buckminster Fuller, and Marshall McLuhan, Postman understood that exploring the larger systems that inform both subjects and technologies had a political imperative.³ He believed that the goal of the program was to form “the nucleus of a cadre of media critics absolutely needed if our society is to deal rationally with present and future problems.”⁴ Speculating on the future of the field, he said at the time, “At this point, it is by no means clear that media ecology will turn out to be a science. Perhaps it will be an art form.”⁵ A model of media ecology as a critical artistic practice paralleled its emergence in academia. Like Postman, the artists who made this work thought that the key to humanity’s survival during a time of overwhelming technological change was an analysis of the limits of communication and the ways in which a medium such as television supports the roles that shape subjectivity. Cybernetics underlay both Postman’s vision of media ecology and the related work that was developing in the art world.

Jack Burnham’s book, *Beyond Modern Sculpture*, published in 1968, traces a history of twentieth-century art that culminates in cybernetics. Burn-

ham recounts how, over the course of the twentieth century, artworks were transformed from passive objects to be viewed to quasi-living things that viewers directly engaged with. He singles out the “cybernetic changeover” that began with the thinking of Norbert Wiener and Ludwig von Bertalanffy as the key point of inception for this work.⁶ Wiener played a crucial role at the Macy Conferences, which ran from 1946 to 1953, where topics ranged from neural networks to game theory and the behavior of automata. Cybernetics was born out of the first several conferences, when participants began to focus on how organization was similarly maintained in both organic and inorganic systems through communication processes. One of the key insights of cybernetics was the mathematization of information and the study of how information flows through systems, governing them as a Watt governor regulates the speed of a steam engine. Wiener’s 1948 book, *Cybernetics, or, Control and Communication in the Animal and Machine*, set an agenda for further study and helped frame the conversations that took place at the later conferences.⁷ A central idea in cybernetics, which would have an influence on media ecology, was that animals (including humans) and machines operate through homeostatic feedback processes that subtend both, allowing for information to be communicated throughout a given system, with agency distributed across the system as a whole. Although Bertalanffy didn’t attend the Macy Conferences, he followed a similar path and acknowledged that there were many affinities between cybernetics and his own research. He held the view that organization was both broadly systematic and more than the province of living beings, developing what he called “general systems theory.”⁸ Like Wiener, Bertalanffy felt that both modern science and technology had increasingly blurred the lines between subjects and objects, and called for the detailed examination of interconnected networks of causation rather than discrete, self-sufficient entities. He based his theory on his training in biology, which he hoped would enable scientists to analyze more complex systems than classical physics did by addressing “the scientific exploration of ‘wholes’ and ‘wholeness’ instead of individual particles.”⁹

Burnham observes that during the same time that cybernetics developed, visual artists also began moving away from singular, static monuments and toward changing information flows. In *Beyond Modern Sculpture*, he follows this development from the organic, abstract sculptures of post–World War II through the work of artists who were emerging in the wake of minimalism.

He singles out Les Levine for special praise, describing his work as “a precise example of systems philosophy” because it reconsiders the relationship between artist, artwork, and audience by focusing on the environment they all share.¹⁰ The key to Levine’s work and that of other like-minded artists, Burnham writes, is “the substitution of ‘aesthetic systems’ for the ‘object d’art.’”¹¹ For Burnham, this work has significant lessons to teach viewers about the interconnected relationship between people and their environment, directly challenging Michael Fried’s contentious assertion that contemporary sculpture’s most salient feature was its “objecthood.” In “Art and Objecthood,” Fried upheld the notion of an autonomous subject, divorced from the object it beheld.¹² He criticized minimalist sculpture for being too dependent on the phenomenological experience of the viewer, thereby incorporating the viewer into the work of art itself. Burnham valued what Fried disparaged. He championed the work of Levine, Robert Smithson, and their peers precisely because they emphasized the contextual relationship between viewing subjects, the objects on view, and the viewing environment even more strongly than the minimalists had.

In a series of later essays, Burnham proposed “systems aesthetics” as an appropriate name for art that followed minimalism.¹³ Other authors suggested “conceptual art,” “process art,” and “body art,” but postminimalism was the name that stuck, at least in the short term. Suggested by Robert Pincus-Witten in 1969, “postminimalism” was an effective catchall in the same way that “postimpressionism” captured the diversity of artistic developments following the impressionist movement.¹⁴ Although discounted by Pincus-Witten, media technologies played a significant role in postminimalism, where they were used in projects that evoked the systemic connections between the contemporary body and its social environment. Burnham clearly recognized the importance of media technology for the postminimalists, as did the artist and editor Willoughby Sharp, who wrote, “Individual works are mostly communicated to the public through the strong visual language of photographs, films, videotapes and other media, all with strong immediacy of impact.”¹⁵ For Burnham and Sharp alike, postminimalism offered a more thorough examination of mediated immediacy than minimalism or even pop art had by recasting the artwork in mediums directly tied to mass mediation. Without ignoring the messages sent by the mass media, their work dove deep into the contemporary mass media by calling attention to the effects it was having on subjectivity through the ecological networks it formed.

Burnham argues that that this new cybernetic, systems-based art was playing a significant part “in shaping our destination as a posthuman species.”¹⁶ By folding the self into systems that included technology, others, and environment, this work was leaving behind older notions of the individual humanist subject. It took the self to be as much a function of its mediating technologies as the producer of these technologies, which Burnham linked directly to ecology. “With increasing aggressiveness,” he writes, “one of the artist’s functions . . . is to specify how technology uses us. Art is becoming a matter of ecological insight.”¹⁷ Linking postminimalism to posthumanism, Burnham abandoned the notion of the artist as *Homo faber*, or the maker and controller of tools or images.¹⁸ From a posthumanist perspective, subjecthood and objecthood weren’t so easily separated. Burnham thought that when viewed ecologically, the tool used the artist as much as the artist used the tool, and the same could be said of the relationship between artworks and viewers or viewers and their natural and technological environments. When Nam June Paik stated that his goal in pursuing television as a creative medium was “to humanize . . . technology,” he was reacting against an earlier generation of critics such as Meyer Schapiro whose humanism turned them against modern technology.¹⁹ By the end of the 1960s, a notion of posthumanism was emerging in the art world whose proponents were examining the ways in which humanity had coevolved with biological and technological systems in mutually inflected ecologies.²⁰

►► Although usually affiliated with the physical materiality of the landscape as medium, Robert Smithson was equally concerned with the mass media and mass mediation as he translated his projects from their physical site into “non-sites” that could be shown in the art world via photographs, film, and even television.²¹ Using various mass mediums to capture his earthworks and bring them back for display in magazines and galleries, he considered virtual reproductions to be as much a part of the work as their on-site existence. The very first project he called an earthwork was slated to use closed-circuit television. During 1966 and 1967, he worked on plans for artworks to be included in the new Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport. Smithson detailed these plans in the same issue of *Artforum* in which Fried’s essay on objecthood appeared, which Smithson would refute in a following letter to the editor.²² Smithson’s plan called for a series of large outdoor

sculptures by himself and three other artists that would be visible from the air to plane passengers as they took off and landed. Concerned with how non-passengers would see these artworks, he proposed the use of closed-circuit television to transmit their images back to monitors placed throughout the airport terminals. While Smithson's plans were never realized, from the outset he clearly acknowledged that the earth had become as much a site of electronic surveillance as it was of unknown or unknowable natural sublimity. In his essay, he evoked the new technological sublime that had emerged since the recent launching of space satellites for both television transmission and geodetic surveying and described the aesthetic potential of such systems: "Remote places such as the Pine Barrens of New Jersey and the frozen wastes of the North and South Poles could be coordinated by an art form that would use the actual land as a medium. Television could transmit such activity all over the world."²³ In these systems, the circulation of information through the viewing network as a whole would take precedence, encompassing audience, earthworks, airplanes, airports, and television. Smithson's plans for the airport went unrealized, and he never had a chance to explore television further in his practice, but other artists would, adopting closed-circuit surveillance for various ends related to ecology.²⁴

The film critic Gene Youngblood developed Smithson's line of thinking in *Expanded Cinema*, where he examined the legacy of the multimedia happenings scene and considered postminimalism and other contemporaneous art movements through the optic of cybernetics and communication theory. Published in 1970, it opens with an introduction by Buckminster Fuller, who describes the earth as hovering on the brink of annihilation. Arguing that technology has the potential to save the day, Fuller calls for human beings to recognize their relationship with each other, technology, and the planet, as if the people were astronauts and the planet a vehicle with limited resources, hurtling through space.²⁵ In a poem called "Inexorable Evolution and Human Ecology," which concludes the introduction, Fuller appeals to humanity to evolve toward global sustainability and to turn away from nuclear destruction by making do "ever more with ever less." Of the various technologies that might help promote sustainability, he singles out the global communication network that surrounds the planet at all times in a blanket of invisible transmissions. Harking back to Marshall McLuhan's notion of the planet as a unified field of electronic all-at-once-ness, Fuller describes this network as a significant part of human ecology, as important as any mineralogical

or biological resource. It should be harnessed, he writes, for the benefit of all people, as an educational and artistic resource to teach us lessons about our shared world.

In *Expanded Cinema*, Youngblood is as passionate as Fuller about this network's potential benefits. Despite the title of his book, he believed that television had come to overshadow cinema's importance in the global communication network. He declares that cinema is obsolete because television now has far greater importance. He writes, "Television extends global man throughout the ecological biosphere twenty-four hours a day," engulfing humanity in a second nature that stretches from the bottom of the ocean to outer space.²⁶ Youngblood dubbed this realm "the videosphere," arguing that, thanks to television, in less than a decade humanity, technology, and the planet have become one vast, intertwined media ecology.²⁷ This process began when *Telstar*, the first television space satellite, was launched in 1962 and was quickly followed by numerous successors. The Apollo missions to the moon were even more momentous, indelibly demonstrating the planet's finitude as humanity looked back on the earth for the first time. These missions culminated in 1969 with the *Apollo 11* moon landing, when astronauts Neil Armstrong and Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin were connected to the earth by a live television feed, demonstrating to the world that the medium, with all its potential for talkback and communicative immediacy, had transcended planetary boundaries along with the astronauts. Youngblood claims that humanity has now moved into a "cybernetic age" in which the new global communications network "functions as nothing less than the nervous system of mankind."²⁸ Nevertheless, he says, this nervous system all too often operates in a state of ill health because it keeps the public tuned into the most clichéd and problematic types of mass entertainment.

With words as strong as those of any critic of television, Youngblood writes, "The prevailing messages of the so-called popular media have lost their relevance because a socioeconomic system that substitutes the profit motive for use value separates man from himself and art from life."²⁹ The economics of commercial television have skewed content toward information that was so easily digested as to be useless. Along with mindless entertainment, there was the troubling rise of closed-circuit television, which had become increasingly prevalent in everyday life. By the early 1960s, surveillance via closed-circuit television was commonly used to prevent theft, helping safeguard the valuables of stores, banks, and museums. An article of the time described how it

was also used in less familiar ways.³⁰ A video camera attached to a microscope allowed an entire class to simultaneously view a microscope slide. Patients at a pharmacy watched their pharmacist prepare their prescriptions. New mothers in a hospital watched their child in the nursery. By the end of the decade, most urbanites had likely experienced closed-circuit surveillance. Either they would have either strolled by a system in the window of an electronic store, seeing themselves captured as they walked past, or, if they were well-to-do, they may have had closed-circuit cameras installed in their apartment building so they could monitor visitors.³¹ During the 1960s, the police in cities including New York began installing outdoor closed-circuit systems for automated, twenty-four-hour monitoring in high-crime areas. By the end of the decade, video cameras were being used to spy on dissidents and war resisters, and even as missile guidance systems. Public space was bristling with closed-circuit systems, seen and unseen. While these systems had obvious benefits, they were also transforming everyday life onto a state of perpetual surveillance. Artists adopted these systems in order to consider how they were blurring the lines between both public and private and observer and observed.

In his discussion of postminimalism, which he ties back to the multimedia happenings scene, Youngblood singles out such “teledynamic environments” being made by artists as a potential curative to the misuse of the airwaves and the rise of closed-circuit surveillance. These environments used closed-circuit television to highlight communication as a systemic and mediated process. He writes:

This approach to the medium may in fact constitute the only pure television art, since the teleportation of encoded electronic-signal information is central to its aesthetic. . . . I use the term teledynamic environment to indicate that the artist works directly with the dynamics of the movement of information within physical and temporal parameters. The physical environment is determined by the characteristics of the closed-circuit video system. The artist is concerned not so much with what is being communicated as with how it's communicated and the awareness of this process.³²

He goes on to describe the artists who constructed teledynamic environments as ecologists. He broadly defines an ecologist as “one who deals with environmental relationships,” and ecology as “the totality or pattern of relations between organisms and their environment.”³³ He doesn't consider these artists

to be entertainers but rather researchers whose work helps make people aware of the ways information is processed in the environments proscribed by the global communication network. Their work acts as a form of consciousness-raising by making viewers aware of how these environments, with all of their potential for good and ill, shape the circulation of information and define contemporary subjectivity.

►► Youngblood singles out three projects that epitomize the artwork as teledynamic environment. One is Allan Kaprow's *Hello*, shown as part of *TV as a Creative Medium*.³⁴ Another is Les Levine's *Iris* (1969). Levine had been using closed-circuit television in his work since early in his career. During the 1960s, Levine was one of the most frequently exhibited young artists in the United States.³⁵ With the money brought in by his success, he was able to buy a portable videotape system in 1965 at the same time as Andy Warhol and Nam June Paik, and he produced *Slipcover*, a precursor to *Iris* that used time-delayed video, in 1966, when Ken Dewey made *Selma Last Year*.³⁶ Originally exhibited at the Art Gallery of Ontario, *Slipcover* traveled to the Architectural League in New York in 1967.³⁷ It was a complex multimedia installation that, like a number of contemporaneous expanded-cinema projects, utterly transformed the gallery space. Closed-circuit television was a small but important part of the installation. Levine covered the walls, ceiling, and floor of the gallery with silver Mylar sheeting. Fans periodically blew air into the sheeting, puffing it up and pressing it in on visitors. Hidden microphones picked up live, ambient sound, which was distorted and replayed. Six slide projectors beamed ghostly images onto the reflective walls and viewers' bodies. When viewers entered the exhibition, a closed-circuit camera captured their images. Levine time-delayed the image and projected it above the door over their heads. His system used the same delay technique as Dewey's and a projection system similar to the one USCO used at the World. When viewers walked into the space, they saw their distorted reflections in the Mylar and heard their own footsteps distorted by audio feedback. Turning around, they saw themselves temporally distorted by several seconds through the video time delay. Levine turned the gallery into a fun house that confused sense perception by reflecting these layers of distorted self-images back at visitors. Alienated from their own reflections, viewers experienced being transported outside themselves, their bodies merging into the environment.

Levine focused more closely on closed-circuit television in several subsequent works. Making use of the simpler form of the grid, he transformed the stacked boxes of minimalist sculpture into banks of surveillance monitors. In 1968 Robert and Janet Kardon commissioned Levine to create an artwork for their collection. He proposed building enclosed mirrored cases for all of the artworks they already owned. Instead of the Kardons' being able to see their collection, their artwork would have dynamically reflected its environment, including the collectors themselves, thus putting the narcissism of art collecting on display inasmuch as hanging expensive works of art in one's home is an ostentatious manifestation of one's wealth, prestige, and good taste. When the Kardons unsurprisingly rejected this idea, Levine built them *Iris*. He once again turned to closed-circuit television, using it instead as a kind of mirror. *Iris* consisted of six monitors, each covered with a brightly colored transparent film, stacked three high and two across in a plastic covered case. Levine tucked three camera lenses at different focal lengths among the monitors; he added a heat sensor as well to act as an on/off switch for the cameras. Two fluorescent lights mounted above and below the middle monitors pointed out at the viewer, providing enough illumination for proper exposure. Levine described *Iris* as "a giant, cybernetic eye" because its function depended upon feedback from the viewer.³⁸ Levine said that "it images people who approach it; input from viewers becomes output from the work, and output then becomes input for the viewer—a technological symbiotic relationship."³⁹ Like a proud parent (or a mad scientist), he referred to *Iris* in the feminine. For Levine, "she" was the living embodiment of television, which he already valorized as "the true micro-organism, a cross between technology and biology."⁴⁰ He chose her name because of her ability to interact with viewers as if she were alive. She operated by sensing the body heat of people standing in front of her, which turned her on and caused her to capture their images, sending them in random order to the screens, where she mixed them using an automatic switching device. Just as a mirror would do, the images reflected whatever was going on before her, the colored gels giving them a pop art sheen. When engaged in this symbiotic exchange, Levine said, "the spectator and the object become partners in the creation of the work of art. *Iris* is really a work for producing art rather than an art object itself. She'll never be static, as traditional painting and sculpture are. . . . I think of [her] as a definite personality."⁴¹

Thoroughly anthropomorphized without being humanoid (like the HAL

9000 computer in 2001: *A Space Odyssey*), *Iris* watched the viewer back. Levine designed her, unlike *Slipcover*, to make viewers feel comfortable with surveillance. The Kardons loved watching and being watched by her, and so did their friends. Janet Kardon described the pleasure she took as her guests became acclimatized to seeing themselves televisually surveyed by this quasi-living being. "One of the things I enjoy about *Iris* is watching people watch it," she said. "In that sense it's alive and involving."⁴² Kardon found the observational system that *Iris* created to be fascinating, as did Levine. "What *Iris* does most of all," he said, "it turns the viewer into information."⁴³ Viewers were fed back into the sculpture, their images directly informing the work. Interacting with *Iris* invoked a sensation of being projected outward and into a cybernetic system. As viewers communed with the sculpture, their subjective sense of themselves became objectified, as if they were looking in a mirror. Conversely, the technological object they confronted was invested with quasi-subjective being.

Levine made *Contact: A Cybernetic Sculpture* in 1969. *Contact* tripled *Iris*'s imaging capacities by housing nine monitors on both sides with a similar camera, sensor, and switching system. Like *Iris*, it created a feedback network where the only content transmitted was the transformation of the viewer into information caught in a loop with a televisual surveillance system. Charlie Bluhdorn, president of Gulf and Western Industries, commissioned it. After being exhibited in Chicago, it was installed in the lobby of Gulf and Western's new headquarters at 15 Columbus Circle, where it stayed for many years. Sitting in the entrance to a corporate office tower, *Contact* revealed the role that surveillance had begun to play in daily life. It called attention to the systems of surveillance that were becoming socially prominent by embodying them in quasi-animate sculptural form. At the time *Contact* was installed, the video monitor banks used for policing were usually hidden behind closed doors. *Contact* made such systems visible, both acknowledging the growing presence of surveillance systems in everyday life and playfully acclimatizing visitors to these systems as they circled around it. It gave lively form to the televisual Big Brother seen earlier in films like *Modern Times* and *Metropolis*, in which a monitor bank represents an all-powerful totalitarian surveyor. Perceptive viewers would have noticed that while communicating with *Contact* they were also being observed by the building's actual television surveillance system.

For a few months in 1969, Levine lent his name to a restaurant in New

York opened by Mickey Ruskin, proprietor of the nightclub and artist's hang-out Max's Kansas City. Levine's Restaurant offered "the finest in Irish, Jewish, Canadian cuisine," a hodgepodge based on his mixed ethnic background that included potato latkes and "lobster Levine." Working in collaboration with John Brockman, Levine installed a closed-circuit television system whose cameras were openly situated as part of the decor. Scanning across the tables, they sent their images to monitors hung on the walls alongside more traditional works of art. A private backroom for celebrities featured a table under closed-circuit surveillance whose image was supposed to be projected with an eight-second delay to a large screen. Levine transformed the everyday space of the restaurant into a setting where televisual surveillance was celebrated as part of the attraction. Visitors could pretend they were celebrities, appearing on screen as their heroes sitting in the back did, or at least this was his intention. The closed-circuit system never worked correctly, the food was "very heavy," and the restaurant quickly went out of business.⁴⁴

Levine played a key role in Jack Burnham's 1970 exhibition, *Software*, in which he put himself under surveillance. Burnham curated the exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York featuring work that exemplified the cybernetic systems aesthetics he was championing. Levine provided the title for the show, adapting the notion of software from computer science to mean communication in general. The work on display emphasized the processes by which information was transmitted rather than the technical means.⁴⁵ Despite its name, the exhibition featured a wide array of technical hardware that, as at Levine's Restaurant, was plagued by malfunction. A cabinet-sized DEC PDP-8 computer that was supposed to run several works, and was one of the largest and most impressive of the exhibition's machines, had significant difficulties. For his contribution to the exhibition, Levine had originally conceived of a live video feed from his studio to a gallery in the museum. When this turned out to be impossible for technical reasons, he had to show himself on tape instead. The resulting work, *A.I.R.* (for "Artist in Residence"), consisted of twelve television sets on concrete pedestals, positioned at roughly head height and arrayed in a semicircle.⁴⁶ It featured images of Levine working in his studio that switched from monitor to monitor on a random basis. He could be seen doing the kinds of everyday things artists do while puttering around in the studio. He made himself available in real time in an accompanying piece called *Wire Tap*, which consisted of

speakers playing back a live audio feed from his telephone. Levine grafted the artist's studio directly onto the museum's gallery through these audiovisual mediators, acknowledging that, however privileged, artworks are but nodes in larger communication systems.

As in his previous work, in *A.I.R.* and *Wire Tap* the artwork became less a means of displaying objects than a means of ecological throughput. Unlike visitors' participation in his previous work, here they merely watched the sets and listened to the audio feed. Despite their prominence in the exhibition, neither *A.I.R.* nor *Wire Tap* had even the rudimentary cybernetic feedback that works like *Iris* and *Contact* were capable of. One reviewer wrote of *A.I.R.* that it "bored [her] to death." This wasn't necessarily detrimental to the piece.⁴⁷ Levine had finally realized the long-standing hope that went back to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's television broadcasts of the 1940s of transmitting the act of artistic creation, but he did so in order to demystify the genius of the individual artist. His telecast of the banality of the artist's daily life demonstrated that the reality of artistic production was not unlike many people's daily routines and was far less interesting than even the usual broadcast television fare. Instead of seeing the artist as a remote and untouchable figure, viewers connected with Levine inasmuch as his time in the studio reflected the ordinariness of their own lives. In Levine's installation viewers consumed a media network that used the institutional frame of the museum as its support and not the precious creations of an artistic genius. He used teletechnology to generate a networked connection between the studio as a site of artistic production and the gallery as a site where the public consumes cultural artifacts. Instead of the individual artifacts shown on television by the Metropolitan Museum, Levine's installation evoked the wider media ecologies that allow visual art, as well as information in general, to circulate between artists, art institutions, and viewers. The appearance of the equipment itself was less important than the entire system whose boundaries crossed between studio and gallery. By using electronic transmission as a kind of readymade, Levine was able to question the ways cultural value was transmitted and received both inside and outside the art gallery. He was asking viewers to consider why mediums like television and the telephone might be valued one way at home and still another as video or installation art, all while the museum itself had its own surveillance system trained on viewers in order to protect and insure the value of the objects on display.

►► Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider's *Wipe Cycle* (1969) is the third work that Youngblood cites as an epitome of the artwork as a teledynamic environment. *Wipe Cycle*, a massive monitor bank whose form and function were similar to that of *Iris*, was included in the exhibition *TV as a Creative Medium*.⁴⁸ Gillette, who had been instrumental in bringing together the group of people who would go on to found Raindance, began his career as a post-minimalist painter. Pursuing an interest in new media, during the winter of 1968 he taught a seminar on Marshall McLuhan's work at the Free University of New York and was briefly affiliated with a group called Co-mediation that included Nam June Paik and Les Levine as occasional participants. Gillette met Schneider, who originally trained as a filmmaker and was working with Global Village, in the winter of 1969. They conducted an interactive experiment in group communication using closed-circuit television at Antioch College in Ohio and went on to collaborate on *Wipe Cycle*. *Wipe Cycle* was the first thing that greeted visitors to the exhibition. Stepping out of the elevator, they were confronted by an enormous, nine-screen monitor bank playing back a bewildering variety of images that rapidly switched from screen to screen. These included snippets of whatever might have been playing at the time on broadcast television mixed with taped images of the gallery during the show's installation, the street outside, a cow grazing in a field, the earth from outer space, a pornographic scene in a bathtub, and live shots of the visitors themselves.

In a setup similar to that of *Iris*, *Wipe Cycle*'s images switched from monitor to monitor in an automatically controlled sequence. Visitors were incorporated into the mix by a camera placed among the monitors. When they walked off the elevator, their images were sent live to the center monitor and then went cycling across the others in time delays of eight and sixteen seconds. The monitors alternated between broadcast and videotaped images, further blurring the distinction between live, delayed, and recorded material. A blank pulse signal passed across the monitors every few seconds, wiping everything away and restarting the cycle to produce an incessantly remixed flow. Recalling Les Levine's earlier comments, Gillette and Schneider said after the exhibition opened, "The most important facet of *Wipe Cycle* was the notion of information presentation and the integration of the audience into the information. . . . It was an attempt to demonstrate that you're as much a piece of information as tomorrow morning's headlines."⁴⁹ Although *Wipe*

Cycle's imagery was denser than *Iris's*, it also seemed to have a mind of its own as it constructed a flowing television collage that included the viewer in its imagery. Gillette and Schneider were more focused than Levine on the flow of broadcast television, saying that their goal was to "overload . . . the automatic information experience of commercial television, without totally divesting it of its content."⁵⁰ The setup of *Wipe Cycle* more closely resembled that of television producers sitting in the studio, switching between cameras and taped and live events, than it did the monitor bank of a security guard. Upon confronting *Wipe Cycle*, visitors saw themselves swept into a confusing flow of programming. They were able to directly interact with this flow when they noticed their own on-screen appearance. By recognizing the machine as a partner and engaging with it as viewers had engaged with Levine's work, they could begin to converse with the other images on screen, and even with their own images through the time delay. Like *Iris* and *Contact*, *Wipe Cycle* transformed television from a thing viewers looked through to something they interacted with. These works were the logical extension of Nam June Paik's playable sets, but instead of functioning as musical instruments, they functioned as seemingly autonomous teledynamic beings. Although clearly nonhuman, they had an agency, however primitive, of their own. At the same time, the imagery they presented looped back to directly reconnect with viewers by transposing them and the viewing space onto the screens, heightening the sense of electronic communication as a form of networked communion that transcended, or at least confused, discrete subjects and objects. All of these works evoked electronic communication as a form of communion between man and machine mediated by the flow of information as it mutually circulated between the two.

In the immediate wake of *Wipe Cycle*, Gillette and Schneider set out to capitalize on its insights and collaborated with Paul Ryan, John O'Reilly, and Woody Vasulka on a commission for the American Can Company. They worked under the auspices of Harvey Lloyd Productions, Inc., a company that was attempting to capitalize on expanded cinema and video, to build a "modular video matrix" that could incorporate bigger audiences into an educational feedback system for prospective wholesale buyers and the company's salesmen.⁵¹ Featuring an enormous metal grid housing more than fifty video monitors with multiple cameras and tape decks, their matrix swelled into a massive environment that fully engulfed viewers. As with *Wipe Cycle*, images were played back live, delayed and on videotape, circulating across the

screens to create an ever-switching mosaic. Gillette was originally optimistic that the piece might find use beyond trade shows as an educational system. Reflecting on the project's link to cybernetics, he said of the project while it was still under development, "The premise behind the system is that all communication is essentially environment and all environment is essentially communication."⁵² The reality was that corporations were delighted to have viewers televisually incorporated into an environment that communicated nothing but commercial values that were ultimately antithetical to the aspirations of Gillette and his cohort. What was unsurprisingly realized in Lloyd's commercially oriented use of the video matrix was, as Gillette and Schneider later recalled, "mainly . . . bald-headed men touting American Can products intermixed with men live-camera gawking at cheesecake hostesses."⁵³ While their massive matrix was the opposite of boring and incorporated viewers on a grander scale than previous teledynamic environments had, it proved that creating such systems could simply reinforce old prejudices as readily as challenging them.

►► Media ecology pervades *Radical Software* and helped justify the kinds of teledynamic environments Gillette and his colleagues were building. *Wipe Cycle* and the American Can Company matrix, along with a host of other ecologically oriented projects, are detailed in a special issue on "Video and Environment," and other issues have sections on "networks and other natural systems" and "ecological literacy." Gillette discussed media ecology in the first issue, which also included writing by Gene Youngblood and a transcription of a videotaped dialogue between members of Raindance and Buckminster Fuller on the interrelationship between planetary ecology, humanity, and technologies like television. Most prominently, Raymond Arlo's essay, "Media Ecology," appeared in the third issue. Arlo was a student of Neil Postman. Despite Postman's emphasis on how media environments shape subjectivity, Postman, like Fuller and McLuhan, was a humanist who still believed that there was an outside from which a rational human observer could reflect upon and alter her or his environment.⁵⁴ Arlo, who was of a younger generation, offers a posthumanist reading of Postman's definition of media ecology by suggesting that observers are completely enmeshed in the systems they observe and their means of observation.

Giving no precedence to any of his terms, Arlo defines media ecology as

“the study of a medium of communication and its effect upon media/society. The study of the effect of other media/society upon a medium of communication. The study of people and their effect upon media/society. The study of the effect of media/society upon people.”⁵⁵ He places the hybrid “media/society” on the same footing as people and their means of communication, weaving them all together into larger circuits of effect. Challenging the centrality of humanity in these networks, his definition suggests that personal subjectivity is immanent in sociotechnical forms rather than transcending them. By conjoining media and society, he also suggests that society, as the ground of the group subjectivity of “the people,” is also inseparable from its mediums of communication.

Gregory Bateson, whose writing appeared in *Radical Software*, was a key figure whose thinking helped usher in both media ecology and posthumanism. Bateson bridged the worlds of the Macy Conferences and early video art. He began his career as an anthropologist, working with his wife, Margaret Mead, in Bali. During World War II, they undertook several war-related projects at the Museum of Modern Art, and after the war they attended the Macy Conferences. Swayed by his exposure to cybernetics, Bateson went on to delve into fields as diverse as psychology, biology, and philosophy in order to construct an expanded theory of mind in which he saw the self and its environment as mutually intertwined, coevolving systems. Operating on the cusp of the transition from a humanist to a posthumanist model of cybernetics, his work pointed the way toward second-order cybernetic theories of autopoiesis and the observation of observation. His writing was collected in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, published in 1972, which had a wide audience and became canonical for media ecologists outside and inside the art world.⁵⁶

Two aspects of Bateson’s thinking were particularly evident in early video art: his theory of expanded mind and the connection he made between art and metacommunication. Bateson’s theory of mind was diametrically opposed to the mind-body dualism of Western philosophy. For Bateson, mind moves beyond the confines of individual subjects, and the transcendental “I” is no longer the bearer of selfhood. In one of his most important papers, “The Cybernetics of ‘Self’: A Theory of Alcoholism,” he notes, “The ‘self’ is a false reification of an improperly delimited part of [a] much larger field of interlocking processes.”⁵⁷ Mind is “immanent, not in some part, but in the system as a whole . . . in the larger system man-plus-environment.”⁵⁸ He gives precedence to the communicative movement of information throughout the

system over any particular part, including the individual “I.” The self is no longer an individual who thinks and acts with purposive rational thought separate from a world of external objects. The self is always incomplete because it’s engaged in continual processes of communication with smaller and larger systems, both internal and external, which allow it to cohere. He sees the self as an ecological network bounded only by how sense (as both sensation and meaning) is restrained and given context as it moves as information through a given system. For Bateson, mind is an ecological phenomenon that moves beyond the boundaries of the human body and even human being, connecting selves and things as they come together in temporarily stable ecologies. The influence of Bateson’s theory of mind is directly evident in the work of Paul Ryan and Dan Graham (discussed later in this chapter) and is indirectly evident in many other early video art installations.

Bateson’s theory of metacommunication is closely tied to his consideration of art. He made one of his most succinct statements on the ecology of visual art during a conference in 1957, the same one where Meyer Schapiro presented his essay criticizing the arts of communication. Bateson also dismissed the products of the mass media as propaganda but put forward a broader view of creativity than Schapiro at the conference. In his paper, “Creative Imagination,” Bateson argues that all forms of communication are creative, even those found in the mass media. Nevertheless, he privileges artistic creativity, which he singles out as a special class of metacreativity.⁵⁹ Although his paper is brief, he suggests that works of art accrue the cultural value that Schapiro ascribes to them when they self-consciously transmit meta-level information about themselves. For Bateson, one of an artist’s most significant jobs is communicating about communication. A work of art gains deeper significance when its self-reflexivity transcends mere formalism by evoking the communication networks in which it is embedded.

During the discussion that took place at the conference, Bateson argued that while everyday communication is creative, it’s also instrumental inasmuch as it is directed largely toward the transmission of specific messages with clear content. Works of art can simultaneously include instrumental content and knowingly comment on that content, thereby reflecting on the conditions of their own communicability in the very act of communicating. Famously defining information as “a difference that makes a difference,” he thought that great works of art question the rules of differentiation that allow noise to be transformed into information by putting these rules on display.⁶⁰ In so

doing, they act as a form of what he calls “metacommunication,” or communication about the ways in which information circulates in a given system.⁶¹ They facilitate higher levels of learning by playfully (i.e., freely) revealing the limits that govern a particular ecology. Rather than allow for “thinking outside the box,” they allow viewers to think about the box itself and even the very problem of boxing that all communication entails. In this way, they help make ecological systems healthier by making them less reactionary and more open to difference. If this wasn’t the case with the matrix that Gillette and his group built, it was because the American Can Company used it to reinforce given economic and sexual stereotypes; but teledynamic environments offered other possibilities that Gillette and others would explore.

►► Of the artists who created closed-circuit video installations, Paul Ryan and Frank Gillette were most closely aligned with Gregory Bateson. They got to know Bateson personally when, in 1970, they were invited to videotape a conference at Princeton where he was speaking. After a first day of fruitless arguing among the elite guests, Ryan sat down on camera with Bateson, opening a cross-generational dialogue that continued for years afterward, some of it in *Radical Software*, where Bateson’s ideas appeared. Although Bateson never wrote about video art, he became one of the few senior figures outside the video art community included in its pages, both through citation and through the publication of one of his essays. At the conference, Bateson handed out copies of “The Cybernetics of ‘Self,’” which Ryan singled out in *Radical Software* as the model for his own theories of expanded selfhood. Afterward, Gillette took Bateson on a tour of New York City art galleries, and Ryan remained in dialogue with Bateson for years to come. Gillette said simply, “Bateson’s influence on my thinking is enormous.”⁶²

Bateson’s theory of mind was particularly important for Ryan. The second issue of *Radical Software* includes Ryan’s essay “Self-Processing,” in which he describes his project *Everyman’s Moebius Strip* and cites “The Cybernetics of ‘Self’” in support of his ideas. Ryan had initially conceived of the piece as a private exercise that someone would undertake using a videotape system. The subject would set up the camera and record a few relaxation exercises, then follow Ryan’s instructions: “Close your eyes and think of someone you love. Remember a happy moment with them. With eyes open, give facial responses to the following people: Joe Namath; Don Rickles; Spiro Agnew;

your mother; Huey Newton; you.”⁶³ Ryan would then instruct the subject to replay the tape and watch her- or himself responding to these prompts. His goal was for participants to “know the difference between how we intend to come across and how we actually do come across.”⁶⁴ He hoped this would make them aware of their own body language as a form of unconscious communication with the world, as much a part of the self as their conscious, verbal responses. As the subject repeated the names, her or his somatic response to public and private figures would be made visible, highlighting the ways in which the self is knowingly and unknowingly inflected by our internalization of others. Invited to participate in *TV as a Creative Medium*, Ryan hesitated because he said he saw himself more as a researcher than an artist.⁶⁵ He finally agreed to turn *Everyman’s Moebius Strip* into an installation by allowing one viewer at a time to participate in a curtained booth, as if it were a confessional.

Because they were neither aware of nor in conscious control of the way their countenance reflected their environment, participants often responded to *Everyman’s Moebius Strip* in a similar way: “Do I look like that?!”⁶⁶ One reviewer said that she felt like the subject of a psychological experiment. Ryan told her that this very technique was indeed used in psychiatric treatment and that his goal was the healthier integration of the self and its world using television as a therapeutic device.⁶⁷ He wanted to demonstrate to viewers the kinds of unrecognized miscommunication that take place in their interactions with others and help correct this. Ryan’s project was closer to video psychotherapy than Allan Kaprow’s more skeptical take on miscommunication in *Hello*. Psychotherapists generally treated technology as a transparent means, however newfangled, of expediting the restoration of an individual’s mental health. But Ryan’s recognition of the setup as a whole differentiates his project from those of video therapists like Milton Berger and Harry Wilmer, whose writing also appeared in *Radical Software*.⁶⁸ Ryan was highly sensitive to the role technology played in the process of communication as it shaped a sense of mediated subjectivity. He wrote, “Taking in your own outside with video means more than just tripping around the Moebius strip in private. One can pass through the barrier of the skin—pass through the pseudo-self to explore the entirety of one’s cybernet—i.e. the nexus of informational processes one is a part of.”⁶⁹ Ryan considered mind to be a function of this topological cybernetic network and not a property that was self-enclosed in an individual “I.” *Everyman’s Moebius Strip* implies that there is no self

beyond the ecologies in which it finds itself embedded, which include the technologies and other subjects that together share what he called a topological relational circuit. Ryan's later projects, such as *Earthscore*, reflected his sensitivity to posthumanism as he worked to further develop relational circuits as a form of cybernetic therapy that would create greater psychological flexibility through an increased openness to others.⁷⁰

Bateson's notion of art as a form of metacommunication underlay Gillette's major projects of the early 1970s, which were exhibited in 1973 at the Everson Museum of Art, in Syracuse, New York. Under the stewardship of its new director, James Harithas, the Everson Museum was quickly becoming the world's foremost institution for exhibiting video art. Harithas had recently appointed David Ross "curator of Video Arts," making Ross the first museum-sanctioned expert in the field.⁷¹ Together they organized many significant early video art exhibitions and performances there by Gillette, Juan Downey, Nam June Paik, and a host of others. Gillette's exhibition, *Process and Meta-Process*, was one of the clearest and most ambitious expressions of art's engagement with an ecological model of cybernetics made in the context of early video art.⁷² In the exhibition catalog, Harithas wrote that Gillette "extends his insights into video technology as an art form and demonstrates complex ecological processes" and that his artworks "communicate the possibility of synergizing man's relationship with nature and with himself in the context of a new cybernetic orientation."⁷³ Although subdivided into smaller works (the "processes"), the exhibition was conceived by Gillette as one large teledynamic environment designed as a form of metacommunication (or "meta-process") about the interrelation between the subjects and objects that make up ecological systems. Gillette understood community, or being in common, to be a function of the ways in which complex networks frame communication. He linked smaller subsystems within the exhibition, including the viewers themselves, to the exhibition as a whole. He wanted viewers to recognize that they were part of a larger interconnected system of sociotechnical observation and not outside it. Gillette referenced the formal language of minimalism throughout the exhibition while continually emphasizing the connections between artworks, viewers, and environment. Moving beyond individual artworks, he designed the exhibition as a whole to highlight the connections between the things on display, the visitors to the exhibition, and the apparatus of exhibition display as an interlinked system.

The exhibition was installed in a series of four galleries arranged in a

circular formation. *Track/Trace* began the show, as had *Wipe Cycle* at *TV as a Creative Medium*, by capturing the viewer's image on a bank of monitors (stacked in a pyramid rather than a grid) and replaying it in both real time and time delay. Unlike *Wipe Cycle*, *Track/Trace* had no content other than the image of the viewer in the gallery space. Gillette arranged the pyramid of fifteen monitors so that it receded backward, away from the viewer. Captured on three cameras, the viewer's image appeared in real time on the uppermost monitor, farthest away. With each successive move downward toward the viewer, the image was delayed in increasing increments of three seconds, until, upon reaching the last row at the bottom, it was delayed for twelve seconds. Every eight seconds the view switched from one camera to another, restarting the delay and providing a different image of the viewer's body. Considerably sparer than *Wipe Cycle*, *Track/Trace* was pared down so that viewers would focus only on their interaction with the technological apparatus. Gillette said that seeing themselves mediated often made adults uncomfortable, but groups of school children loved it because they were uninhibited enough to playfully engage with themselves and each other using the system's feedback.

The next gallery contained *Tetragramaton*, a series of three pyramids of monitors arranged in a circle, playing back videotapes of nature scenes. Images of various biomes (ocean, pasture, dune, pond, stream, glen) played simultaneously across multiple channels, surrounding viewers with, Gillette wrote, "a video ecology . . . designed to immerse the audience in the process of nature."⁷⁴ Screened on monitors, nature could be accessed only at one remove, in homogeneous shades of videotape gray and with a single, unified soundtrack that mixed sounds from all the environments. The sublime splendor of the real-world environments was translated into something more "lean and stark," as one visitor described the piece to Gillette.⁷⁵ Videotape became a means for abstracting nature as earlier generations of artists had done in painting.

In the last two galleries, animals were put on display as in a zoo or a science lab. These creatures were observed both by visitors and by closed-circuit cameras. *Subterranean Field* consisted of ten thousand termites trapped in a flat glass case eating their way through thin panels of cherry-wood veneer. Drawn not by a human hand but by the voracious degustation of a collaborative colony of termites, the work came to resemble a modernist abstract painting, echoing *Tetragramaton*'s abstraction of natural landscapes. The

movement of the colony and its ongoing creativity were tracked by a scanning video camera mounted above the case, capturing the composition as it progressed. In the same room sat *Terraquae*, a series of five large terraria, each holding a self-contained system that reflected different aspects of natural ecological systems. Each terrarium was monitored not only by visitors to the exhibition but also by its own overhead surveillance camera tracking every move. The boxlike form of the terraria, arrayed one after the other, recalled minimalist sculptures but with living beings inside. One terrarium, designed to evoke cycles of growth and decay, contained mold living on agar and the rotting exoskeletons of dead horseshoe crabs. Its glass was eventually rendered opaque by the growing mold. In another, thousands of crickets lived out their life cycles, chirping riotously while feasting on maple leaves. Another demonstrated parasitism, with snails that built their own shells sharing space with hermit crabs that were dependent on stealing shells from others. Two species of iguana got along without competition in yet another case, sitting together and happily eating geranium flowers. The last contained tortoises and tarantulas that thoroughly ignored each other; at the exhibition's opening, two tarantulas were locked in a death match on the back of an oblivious tortoise. The final room of the exhibition was turned into one enormous terrarium. The center of the gallery was filled with a large geodesic dome containing recently hatched chicks. To one side, eggs were being incubated in yet another terrarium. Both were surveilled by video cameras.

Video feeds from the various works in the exhibition were sent to the *Integration Matrix*, a bank of monitors in the same gallery as *Subterranean Field* and *Terraquae*. The *Integration Matrix* closed the circuit of the exhibition as a whole, uniting it into a larger communication network by knitting together its many pieces. If the other works in the exhibition featured unfolding ecological processes, the *Integration Matrix* focused on metacommunicating about the ecology of the exhibition in its entirety. By uniting the exhibition as a whole, the *Integration Matrix* asked viewers to consider their own interrelation with the other processes also on display, as well as the means of display itself. Through the slight remove of a closed-circuit system, viewers could reflect on the systems of observation found throughout the exhibition, including the gallery itself as a stage for communication. Gillette's exhibition was decidedly antihumanist in its recognition that the basis of community extended beyond human-to-human communication. By aligning humans with the nonhuman beings in the exhibition, he showed that humanity was

just as subject to mediation as any other part of the system. He used television to tie these subsystems together in order to demonstrate that technology is as much a part of an ecology as the living beings and environments in which they live. Gillette wasn't celebrating humanity's dominion over biology and technology. The *Integration Matrix* made viewers aware of their own place in a larger system where they were but one small thread in a larger pattern of meaning that wove together other living beings and systems of observation and display.

►► Of the other artists whose work appeared regularly in *Radical Software*, Juan Downey forged a link between Bateson's initial career as an anthropologist and his later writing on ecology. Downey bridged the cybernetics of self with issues tied to national and ethnic identity. After completing a degree in architecture, he moved in 1965 from his native Chile to Washington, DC, where he met James Harithas, then the director of the Corcoran Gallery. While there, he built a series of postminimalist cybernetic sculptures that garnered a fair amount of attention. Variations on white boxes, they incorporated technology that allowed for unusual types of viewer interaction. *Against Shadows*, made in 1969, consisted of a small white box on the floor connected by a tube to a larger white box fitted with a grid of lights and mounted on the wall. The box on the floor contained an identically patterned grid of photocells. When a shadow was cast over the photocells, the box on the floor sent a signal to the box on the wall, which lit up in the same shape as the shadow, positively inverting it. In the brightly lit gallery, the only shadows cast on the box were those of visitors. As with Nam June Paik's versions of *Participation TV*, viewer participation was necessary to complete the piece.

Downey's *With Energy beyond These Walls*, also made in 1969, was included in the exhibition *Cybernetic Serendipity*, which appeared at the Corcoran Gallery after debuting at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London. Organized by Jasia Reichardt, *Cybernetic Serendipity* featured a pioneering display of computer-generated artworks and other forms of electronically triggered interactive objects.⁷⁶ *With Energy beyond These Walls* consisted of two white sculptural elements that transmitted signals back and forth by means of radio waves. The larger of the two was a T-shaped structure that housed a series of sensors and an electric organ. The sensors could read signals from passing

aircrafts and boats, as well as cosmic rays and ambient temperature. Input from the sensors triggered the organ, which would broadcast notes to the smaller sculpture, a simple box with a speaker that played the notes. If the larger sculpture failed to reach its trigger thresholds, the smaller sculpture would signal for a seventh chord indicating the lack of other input. Downey added this last feature so that, as he wrote on a drawing he made of the piece, “in the absence of all forms of energy, the two sculptures maintain a dialog.” Unlike *Against Shadows* and much of the other work at *Cybernetic Serendipity*, the sculptures talked back and forth among themselves; with sense organs exceeding the powers of the human body, they communicated in a hermetic language all their own, excluding viewers from participating in their conversation.

Downey moved to New York City in 1969 and met Frank Gillette, whose *Wipe Cycle* was on display at TV as a *Creative Medium*. In a recent interview, Gillette said that they went to see *Wipe Cycle* several times, which initiated a long-standing friendship and ongoing conversation regarding “video and its context.”⁷⁷ After he met Gillette, portable videotape recording systems became one of Downey’s primary means of production during the 1970s. He allied himself with Raindance and coedited *Radical Software*’s special issue, “Video and Environment,” which included an essay on urban ecology by Bateson.⁷⁸ The issue opens with Downey’s utopian manifesto, “Technology and Beyond,” which begins with a critique of industrialization and the assembly line as “truncating man from nature.”⁷⁹ He proposes cybernetics as an alternative to older forms of industry, arguing that the “invisible architecture” of electronic networks is the only way to close the “man–nature chasm” and develop “a post-political, erotic, mystic, electromagnetic level of reality.”⁸⁰ For Downey, the goal of further developing such invisible architecture is “communicant balance,” or a future of ecological accord brought about by overcoming “misapplied technology” that “disharmonize[s] the interaction between humanity and nature.”⁸¹

Downey’s text was accompanied by images and descriptions of several recent, performance-based works in which he attempted to strike this balance. Two of these were shown at the Everson Museum. On January 6, 1973, Downey showed *Three-Way Communication by Light*, his first work to incorporate closed-circuit television. Describing the piece, Downey wrote, “From the onset, my video work has been concerned with representing the self as Other,” a theme he’d return to, particularly in his cybernetic and an-

thropological works. Taking ecology as their source, these works explored problems related to the self versus others and how technology both mediates and mitigates difference. *Three-Way Communication by Light* consisted of three performers with their faces painted white arranged in a triangle on the gallery floor. Downey projected previously shot film of each of the performers' unpainted faces onto their whitened faces, which became ever-changing screens receiving images of each other. Closed-circuit video cameras were pointed at the performers' faces, connected to monitors next to them. The low-fidelity monitors further exaggerated their appearance, making them look like figures from a Francis Bacon painting caught in an inchoate state of transformation between self and other. Laser audio transmission conducted the performers' live voices back and forth, further connecting them. Downey made the laser light brightly visible by a fog of dry ice, which rendered the performers' bodies even less distinct while clearly demarcating their balanced, isoscler connection, emphasizing the system as a whole and the process of becoming over the individuality of its human participants. By chatting back and forth along the laser lines, the performers interacted with one another, but the audience sat outside of their communication network, watching from the sidelines. Downey presented viewers with a striking tableau of an ecological system in which the lines between individual subjects was blurred by mediating technologies. Nevertheless, little connected the performers and the audience other than the mediation of the video monitors. The performers were otherwise locked in their own separate ecosystem.

The next day at the Everson Museum, Downey debuted *Plato Now*, which bound performers and audience more closely together using shadows, much as he had in his earlier sculpture. *Plato Now* featured a row of nine people meditating, including Ross and Bill Viola, the latter of whom was a student working at the museum at the time. The performers faced a blank wall. A closed-circuit video camera was pointed at each of their faces. Practicing biofeedback, they wore headphones and attempted to produce alpha waves by calming their minds. Doing so triggered the playback on the headphones of a recording of one of several texts by Plato related to the allegory of the cave. The images of the performers' faces lost in concentration with eyes closed were sent to monitors behind each performer, where the audience stood. Downey cast bright light behind the audience so that as viewers moved from monitor to monitor their shadows danced across the meditators and the far wall. While the viewers' shadows didn't activate the piece as they did

in *Against Shadows*, they symbolically linked their presence in the gallery with the inner thoughts of the meditators. Upending Plato's allegory of the cave, Downey's meditators rejected the illusions of the shadows by turning inward. In closing their eyes to the cameras and the audience, they were also rejecting television, which Downey was implying had become the new de facto vehicle for the false projection of things. His performers refused the screen's virtual artifice. By shutting television out as Nam June Paik had once half-jokingly advised, the meditators were taking time away from mediated illusions to sit quietly and ponder the nature of reality. Nevertheless, by putting their faces on-screen, Downey suggested that television might still be used as a vehicle for representing experiences other than corporate anesthesia, in which spectacle is forsaken for contemplation. *Plato Now* presented people seeking inner balance away from screen's usual host of chattering imagery. The images of Downey's meditators strongly contrasted with those of the talking heads typically found on television, whose look out at the audience insistently attempts to connect with viewers. When staring at talking heads, viewers typically become receivers of a one-way stream of mediated, and often useless, conversation. As with USCO's deployment of television as an aid for group meditation, *Plato Now* communicated the idea that, as readily as electronic technology provides a means of chatty distraction, it could more usefully contribute to restoring mental balance and quieting the mind.

Although Downey waxes mystical in "Technology and Beyond," he was acutely aware of politics and adapted ideas from cybernetics for the purposes of sociopolitical change and building sympathy for others, particularly those living on the margins of Euro-American life. In an aside that characterizes a significant aspect of the work he was developing, he describes how the Judeo-Christian anthropocentric tradition pronounced any art made outside of it inferior. "The evolution of this geo-political arrogance," he writes in "Technology and Beyond," "is the narrow-minded imperialist conception of the primitive and the exotic. Racism applied to art is cultural suicide as well as homicide."⁸² When this essay was published, Downey was just starting a body of work collectively known as Video Trans America, in which he would explore indigenous cultures across the Americas. He soon left New York for a series of trips "from Canada all the way down to Tierra del Fuego" to both document these cultures and contribute to them by entering into dialogues using portable video technology.⁸³ He announced the project, which would occupy him until the end of the decade, in the same issue of

Radical Software in which “Technology and Beyond,” appears: “Cultural information (art, architecture, cooking, dance, landscape, language, etc.) will be mainly exchanged by means of videotape shot along the way and played back in the different villages, for the people to see others and themselves. The role of the artist is here conceived as a cultural communicant, as an activating aesthetic anthropologist with visual means of expression: videotape.”⁸⁴ Downey’s encyclopedic goal was “to develop an encompassing perspective among the various populations inhabiting today the American continents.”⁸⁵ His method was to show footage he had taped of one indigenous community to the next and then attempt to capture aspects of their culture that they found similarly significant. He was imperative about raising awareness of these cultures through a “rejection of ‘white cultural imperialism,’ done with lots of loving care—a turning away from colonialism to an affirmation of Indian culture.”⁸⁶ Between 1973 and 1976, he made three trips, to Mexico, Central America, and South America. Various people joined him on these excursions, including his wife, Marilys, and her children, as well as Frank Gillette, Ira Schneider, Beryl Korot, and Willoughby Sharp. In 1977 Downey and his family spent an extended time in the Amazon jungle in Venezuela living with several Yanomami communities. He spun many artworks out of the footage he taped on his journeys, ranging from complex teledynamic environments to self-contained but equally multilayered single-channel documentaries.

An early public display of this work was one of its most elaborate. On April 5, 1974, Downey exhibited the *Video Trans America De-briefing Pyramid* during a conference on video art at the Everson Museum.⁸⁷ Downey strung a suite of monitors from scaffolding in a diamond-shaped, octahedral pyramid. The dancer Carmen Beuchat performed in the pyramid as Downey circled around her with video camera in hand, responding to her moves. The camera’s images were mixed live with those shot during Downey’s travels to Mesoamerican pyramids in Mexico and Guatemala. On-screen, Beuchat seemed to float free of gravity, a feeling Downey had experienced when climbing the pyramids. The audience watched from the sidelines. The performance greatly impressed Davidson Gigliotti of the Videofreex, who later recalled, stereotyping Latino masculinity, “Downey did a macho performance with . . . Beuchat, lashing video cables around like whips as he did a furious dance with his camera and his black leather outfit and boots.”⁸⁸ A later iteration of *Video Trans America*, shown in 1976 at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, featured a similar construction redesigned for viewer par-

ticipation. In this version, the monitors were arranged along the perimeter of a dark gallery. A film projector hung from the ceiling, pointing downward and projecting its images on a screen on the floor. Viewers were invited to slip off their shoes, stand on the screen, and be bathed in a pyramid of light while looking down at images Downey had shot while traveling. A video camera merged the viewer's body with Downey's images on the monitors along the periphery of the room where other bits of travelogue were being screened. The viewer's body dissolved into the places and people Downey encountered, becoming other as it was incorporated into the installation. Evoking the ecological mediation of identity, Downey suggested that by becoming other, even temporarily, the viewer could be disabused of the clichés of stereotyped difference that even fellow members of the art world still fell prey to.

The problem of anthropology and otherness suffuses the Video Trans America series. Downey was one of the few artists to address ethnic identity in the context of postminimalism. He was born in Chile to a family of European heritage described as "affluent" and "upper-middle class" and was, by his own admission, "raised by an Indian woman" who was his nanny.⁸⁹ At the same time, he was a Latin American artist who lived and worked primarily in New York City and was therefore a member of a minority group in both the United States and the Eurocentric art world. He approached his subject matter as both an insider and an outsider. He was an insider because of his strong identification with his Latin American heritage, which he recognized was intimately linked to the history of people living in the Americas before the arrival of Europeans. He was an outsider inasmuch as he also acknowledged that he was visiting indigenous communities as a cultural imperialist. In the parlance of the day, Downey worked not as an "activating anthropologist" but as an "action anthropologist," which not only meant forgoing disinterest and the objectification of the people whom he met by trying to find common ground and a basis for mutual collaboration, but also meant trying to change their lives and even their culture, which was arguably a paternalistic undertaking.

When Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead did their early anthropological fieldwork, they treated the people with whom they lived as objects to be observed from as great a distance as possible. During the 1930s, Bateson and Mead undertook a project in Bali that became a touchstone for visual anthropology when they brought cameras to shoot still and moving images as part of their fieldwork. They used the cameras to shed light on a variety of

activities, undertaking what they referred to as “an experimental innovation” in capturing aspects of a community’s culture using film as a more advanced technique than note taking.⁹⁰ With film, they could simultaneously capture long sequences of activity in images and the larger context in which these activities took place. When they published their findings in the book *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis* in 1942, they used sequences of images to illustrate activities such as farming, childrearing, food preparation, and dance.⁹¹ The images in the book were shown in grids that allowed for spatial comparison, which frequently included paintings and other aesthetic objects representing actions and ideas that were contrasted with their filmic representations. Although they were resolutely scientific in their own pursuits, Bateson and Mead acknowledged that artists and artworks were often better able to capture aspects of culture than scientists could, and situated their own images in relation to these others. Nevertheless, they referred to each individual photograph as “almost purely objective” and the juxtaposition of photographs as “a step toward scientific generalization” and not a process of aesthetic selection.⁹²

While it’s unclear exactly how familiar Downey was with Bateson and Mead’s work, the Video Trans America project begs comparison with it. Downey certainly knew Bateson’s writing from *Radical Software*, and by the 1960s Mead was one of the world’s foremost public intellectuals. When Downey began Video Trans America, both Bateson’s and Mead’s attitudes toward anthropology had changed. The importance of cybernetics and systems theory had risen to the fore, and they recognized that there was no outside to observation, even for the most purportedly objective observer engaging with the most alien culture. Over time, said Bateson, he’d begun to recognize that “the culture-contact situation is one that itself shapes the thinking of those who study it,” and he came to accept that the observer and the observed weren’t so readily separated.⁹³ Not only did the observer affect those she or he observed, but the observed affected the observer in a mutual transformation larger than that of either party alone. The development of action anthropology during the 1960s, by Sol Tax and others, was one consequence of this recognition. Action anthropologists realized that their presence inevitably affected the communities they studied and that they were affected in turn. In opposition to the paternalism of both missionaries and state-sponsored aid programs, they set out to serve the communities they visited by helping them directly, however they could, in coequal relationships, although

they were also ultimately accused of paternalism, often by the groups with whom they worked.⁹⁴ Another related consequence was the development of programs designed to facilitate the ability of indigenous communities to tell their own stories as a form of visual anthropology. Mead directly supported the indigenous filmmaking project Navajo Film Themselves in 1966. Several years later, the producers of the Canadian indigenous filmmaking project Challenge for Change began using portable video equipment to make their work, which received considerable coverage in *Radical Software*.

Video Trans America would have been inconceivable without both the cybernetic turn in anthropology and the indigenous filmmaking and video-making movement. *Circle of Fires*, made in 1979, comes closest to the kind of visual anthropology practiced by Bateson and Mead. Although not a true teledynamic environment, it consists of a two-channel video installation of monitors on black pillars arranged in the round with interspersed benches. The benches put the viewers' heads at the same height as the monitors so they seem to be sitting together with the people depicted. The monitors are grouped in pairs, with each pair showing the same set of two different images of Yanomami villagers performing various everyday tasks such as preparing food and eating, delousing each other, singing, dancing, and simply lying still, edited with a subtly poetic staccato rhythm. The installation recalls Bateson and Mead's book on Bali in its spatialization of everyday activities for the purpose of anthropological observation, unfolded into a participatory environment but with a more aesthetically refined sensibility. The circular grouping of the installation mimics in small scale the *shabono*, or open circular pavilions, in which Yanomami live. Instead of viewing the videotapes from the objective distance of a theatrical audience as students watching an ethnographic film would, viewers sit as if they were guests of the community on view via Western technology transposed onto a Yanomami form. Although *Circle of Fires* offers a simulacral experience, joining in a group with the figures on-screen lends an increased intimacy to the actions on view. While this creates a more empathic viewing experience, it also hides the often fraught relations between anthropologists and their subjects.

Downey reveals the tensions behind these relations in *The Laughing Alligator*, also made in 1979, the single-channel videotape that concludes the Video Trans America series.⁹⁵ Even less a teledynamic environment than *Circle of Fires*, *The Laughing Alligator* is an impressionistic documentary whose best-known scenes delve into the relationship between observer and observed. It

consists of a series of short, interconnected vignettes with a mix of voiceover and synchronized sound that weaves together images from Downey and his family's time with the Yanomami and their reflection on these events back in New York. Unlike the typical ethnographic film, it's filled with an emotive sense of longing for the time Downey spent in Venezuela and the way of life in the jungle, which he contrasts to modernity. He begins by playing into the stereotype of the Yanomami as "the fierce people" and says that he "desired so ardently to be eaten up" by the "cannibals" who lived in the jungle so he could stay with them forever. The next scene develops the theme of Yanomami aggression. A voiceover of Downey narrating a journey he took with two men accompanies images he shot while traveling with them. Prepared to catch any prey they encountered along the way, one man carried a loaded shotgun and the other a large bow. Once away from their village, the man with the shotgun pointed it at Downey, threatening to kill him. The tables having turned, the observer had suddenly and frighteningly become the observed. Downey, who was already videotaping, instinctively pointed his camera at the man, as if it were a weapon. He says that the men were unsure if it could shoot bullets at them, and the man with the bow also took aim at him. Pinned between them, Downey stood his ground. Keeping his camera to his eye, he moved it slowly from one man to the other as they crept closer. An anxious observational standoff ensued that was nearly unbearable for Downey, but he persevered, showing no fear until they finally lowered their weapons. Smiling, the man with the gun pretended to shoot Downey and they moved on. Western technology reaching a truce with indigenous technology, he had apparently passed their test. Although this episode continues to suggest the penchant for violence in Yanomami life, Downey doesn't dwell on it. Images of good humor appear from this point forward, suggesting that the Yanomami are as playful as they are tough.

A number of scenes follow. In one of the tape's most charming segments, Marily's teenage daughter, Titi Lamadrid, describes her personal experiences with Yanomami dating, recalling Margaret Mead's earliest work on the sex lives of adolescent Samoans.⁹⁶ The tape ends with two stories. In the first, Downey recounts the Yanomami's myth of the laughing alligator, which tells the origins of fire and is linked to their practice of consuming small amounts of ash from the remains of their cremated loved ones mixed in banana soup. This explains the popular references to the Yanomami as "cannibals," revealing the loving ritual behind their consumption of miniscule amounts of human



Juan Downey, *The Laughing Alligator* (1979)

bodies. With this revelation, it becomes clear that Downey's desire to be eaten by the Yanomami is an expression of the love he feels for their culture and how profoundly it has affected him. The video's last scene begins with an image of Downey back in New York with his hair cut and his body painted in the style of the Yanomami. Although thousands of miles away, he's adopted their identity. Reversing directions, he addresses how his visit affected the Yanomami, describing a videotape he helped make of "an old Indian deaf mute" woman who had asked him to record her singing "nearly silent songs." Made at the woman's behest in collaboration with several villagers, this became one of the community's favorite recordings, which they watched numerous times. Downey explains that the woman could utter only "light croaks" and "strange howls without volume." His discussion accompanies shots of the villagers made with his video equipment, stills of which have become iconic images of the Video Trans America project as a whole. Although Downey never explains why the Yanomami were so fascinated with this footage and he leaves its interpretation hanging as the tape ends, it raises the question of voice and who gets to speak in a typical anthropological exchange.

Downey stated that his initial intention in undertaking the Video Trans America project was to be "an agent of change" who, using videotape, would act "like a chemical catalyst" by enlightening the people he encountered in his travels regarding the connections between their culture and that of other indigenous Americans. Instead, he admitted that he was the one who had

changed, becoming “a true offspring of my soil, less intellectual and more poetic.”⁹⁷ In *The Laughing Alligator*, he often seems to value Yanomami culture more than the culture he associates with life in New York. Throughout the tape, he and his family discuss the many ways they were deeply affected by their encounters with indigenous communities. And yet the Yanomami barely speak for themselves. While viewers are inevitably led to the conclusion that Downey succeeded in helping the Yanomami tell their own stories in a new medium, he never shows their videotapes. He demonstrates that the community clearly enjoyed entering the world of television by showing how the observed eagerly became self-observers in teledynamic environments of their own creation. Although the images of the Yanomami using Downey’s video equipment highlight the social role played by mediating technologies both familiar and unfamiliar, he never addresses whether television-related technology was important for their community after he left or if it helped one community gain any understanding of another. Without this broader discussion, *The Laughing Alligator* risks reinforcing the assumption that indigenous people need unfamiliar technology bequeathed by outside guides to engage in self-representation.

Another problematic aspect of Video Trans America as a whole is the potential it has to exoticize indigenous communities for art world audiences by transforming its subjects into objects on display. Downey worked to avoid this by making his empathetic connection with the people he met the focus of the series. Video Trans America is more than a disinterested, encyclopedic record of vanishing cultures. It allows viewers to share Downey’s connection with the communities he visited by seeing the rich possibilities that lives lived on the outer edges of modernity offer, however foreign they might otherwise appear to urban viewers. While Downey’s poetic imagery certainly romanticizes the people and places on view, it also encourages viewers to feel the same sense of sympathetic wonder that he did when he was there. Video Trans America succeeds inasmuch as he’s able to imaginatively transport viewers out of the gallery and into the experiences he and his traveling companions had in the field, allowing viewers to experience at secondhand the relationships Downey and company built with the people they met and the places they went through the mediating apparatus of portable video. Even if, in these works, direct dialogue with the people on view is impossible, Downey affords his audience opportunities to become as open to cultural difference and as taken by indigenous cultures as he was.

►► Many artists beyond the immediate circle of those working on *Radical Software* built teledynamic environments during the early 1970s. Shirley Clarke purchased a range of television-related equipment that she installed around the Chelsea Hotel, where she lived. In collaboration with members of the Videofreex, she held workshops where participants developed ephemeral performances that combined closed-circuit television and videotape recording in various ways. Bruce Nauman and Peter Campus used closed-circuit television to construct participatory installations designed to disorient sense perception as Les Levine's *Slipcover* did. Joan Jonas developed a series of works in which she used closed-circuit video on stage, although the audience, sitting on the opposite side of the proscenium, was left outside the video loop.⁹⁸ Of these artists—most of whom were associated directly with postminimalism—Dan Graham and Vito Acconci both appeared in the pages of *Radical Software* and were especially concerned with media ecology. They were familiar with the work of Gregory Bateson and, Margaret Mead, as well as Kurt Lewin, who had also participated in the Macy Conferences and whose writings on psychology were important to them both.⁹⁹ Graham began his career in 1964 while still in his early twenties, as director of the AG Gallery in New York City. Predicting the advent of postminimalism at a moment when minimalism itself was still in full bloom, he curated Sol LeWitt's debut exhibition and was planning Robert Smithson's when, less than a year later, the gallery went out of business. After the gallery folded, Graham focused on writing art criticism while continuing to curate exhibitions and making his own art. He sent a portfolio of his poetry and essays to Acconci, who was also transitioning from writing to the visual arts. Acconci coedited the mimeographed magazine *o to 9* with Bernadette Mayer, which published Graham's essay "Eisenhower and the Hippies" in 1969.¹⁰⁰ Graham and Acconci became close friends, beginning a long-standing conversation about art and the mass media that lasted for more than a decade.¹⁰¹

In 1969 Graham also wrote the essay "Subject Matter" for a book on ecological art in which he largely ignored earthworks in favor of a broader assessment of how his work and that of his contemporaries were ecologically rethinking subjectivity.¹⁰² He notes in the essay that in ecologically focused work "both the artist, the transported material (itself still part of an ongoing environmental process) and the viewing subject are in-formation (in the process of change)."¹⁰³ He links his work to this position in a pithy, one-sentence autobiography written around the same time: "My subject matter

is in-formation.”¹⁰⁴ This epigram is a quadruple entendre, unfolding into a foursquare set of positions: “my art is information”; “my art is in formation”; “my self is information”; “my self is in formation.” With one economical statement, Graham evokes the relationship between himself and his work as an ecological system in which subject, object, and information are in a continual process of mutually inflected transformation. Both he and Acconci would develop work that allowed the audience to share this understanding of the self as something formed by mediated information networks.

Graham and Acconci presented some of their earliest work as visual artists in a series entitled “Performances and Activities” held at New York University in late 1970 and early 1971 under the auspices of the John Gibson Gallery and NYU’s Art Students’ Association. Although there is no account of Neil Postman attending these performances, they recall his comments on the artwork as media ecology, and it is certainly possible that he or his students were there. Graham performed TV *Camera/Monitor Performance*, in which he lay on a stage at approximately the level of the tops of the heads of his viewers.¹⁰⁵ Holding a video camera that was hooked up to a monitor located behind the audience, he rolled back and forth, from one end of the stage to the other while looking through the camera and attempting to keep it pointed at the monitor. When he was on-target, this produced video feedback on the monitor; when he was off-target, both his body and the audience appeared on-screen. Graham cleverly folded the audience into his performance without requiring them to leave their seats. Audience members shifted their attention between Graham at the front of the room and the images of him and themselves on the screen at the back of the room. He fed himself and his audience back into an ecological system that limned the immediacy of live television by simultaneously confronting viewers with a live event and its televisual representation and forcing them to choose which to watch. Viewers could situate themselves relative to the performance only by shifting their attention between its opposed parts: if they watched the live event, they missed its monitoring; if they watched the monitor, they saw it at one remove. Even more, it was only by watching the monitor that viewers could tell if Graham was on- or off-target, but the position of the monitor behind them made this difficult to see. As the members of the audience felt themselves turning away from the “real” event in order to view its reproduction on the monitor, they experienced how television’s immediacy is predicated on spatial distance. Instead of seeming to overcome distance, as the illusion of

immediacy does in everyday television watching, Graham made this distance palpable.¹⁰⁶

Acconci evokes a sense of mediated immediacy even more forcefully in *Centers*, from 1971, a piece not shown at the NYU series. Although *Centers* is a single-channel black-and-white videotape, Acconci manages to create a strong sensation of teledynamic participation for viewers by calling attention to the presence of the television screen as a mediator of both live and recorded information. For the duration of the tape, a single, unedited shot frames Acconci's head and shoulders while he holds his hand aloft and points his index finger at the center of the camera. The artist faces the viewer, half visible and half hidden behind his extended arm, with his finger pointing directly at the center of the monitor and so out toward the audience. In notes for *Centers*, Acconci writes, "My attempt is to keep my finger constantly in the center of the screen. I keep narrowing my focus into my finger. The result[ing] TV image turns the activity around: a pointing away from myself, at an outside viewer. . . . I'm looking straight out by looking straight in."¹⁰⁷ For more than twenty minutes, he keeps his hand raised and his finger outstretched, which quivers madly as he struggles to keep it aloft. As the tape begins, his hand covers his face up to and including his eyes, becoming a second face that takes the place of his gaze at the audience. Despite his long hair, he becomes an image of authority—half Uncle Sam, half Big Brother—whose mediated point commands obedience. In pointing through the television screen, he manifests this look with his whole body, his arm and finger extending the direct address of his eyes out at the viewer. Such an address is uncommon in film but quite common in live television, where hosts such as news anchors, ensconced in a studio, look out and speak to home viewers as if they were actually present. Acconci replaces the host's eyes and voice with an emphatic point that calls attention to the television industry's use of direct address. He points through the camera to the viewer, who is, for him, spatially and temporally absent.¹⁰⁸

Acconci's pointing finger opens onto a paradox. At first, the viewer seems to be the object of his pointing. Then Acconci seems to become an object as the whole of his being concentrates in his fingertip, which blots out his persona and becomes a strange thing hovering in the center of the screen. Then his finger seems to point not to the viewer but to the screen, then to the camera, then by extension to the system as a whole. The center around which Acconci's subjectivity and the subjectivity of the viewer pivot suddenly exfoliates into an ecology where what at first seems like presence unfolds into layer



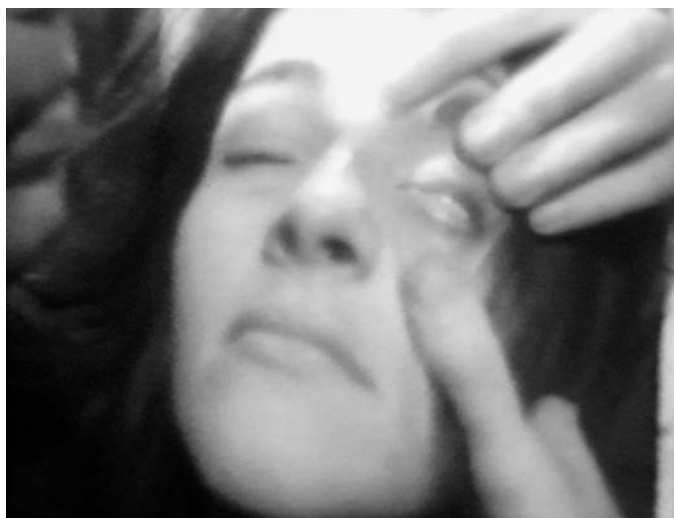
Vito Acconci, *Centers* (1971)

after layer of mediation. Despite the fact that his audience is absent and his gesture is multiply mediated, he nevertheless seems to connect with viewers in an imperative present tense. He points to the audience as if he could break through the screen and touch them with all the immediate here and now claimed for television. His gesture inescapably says, “This-is-going-on. I’m pointing at you, now.” Although his performance is captured on videotape and never broadcast live, he plays on the fact that viewers are conditioned by watching live television to feel co-present with talking heads. His point emphatically interpellates the viewer by calling out: “Hey, you! Pay attention! Are you watching me? I’m watching you.” It’s a phatic gesture, opening onto communication, that demands that he be watched as if he were communing with viewers who are present.¹⁰⁹ In seeming to ask viewers to keep the channel of information between him and them open, his gesture points toward the ways in which social communion is both opened and foreclosed by television, whose immediacy brings people together only by keeping them apart. It heightens the nonreciprocity of the phatic communion that takes place between subjects on either side of the screen by calling attention to how broadcast subjects reach out to touch viewers but can’t be touched in return.

Over the course of the video, his finger increasingly wavers as his arm becomes exhausted. His hand slips downward and his eyes become visible, his

look making contact with viewers only through his body's increasing exhaustion. He wants viewers to respond to these exertions as if they were taking place right there and then, sympathetically watching as his embodiment of the male look strains and breaks down. Questioning the look of male authority, he's neither the urbane host nor omnipotent surveyor. He's desperate to connect. Toward the end of the video, he struggles visibly to keep his finger aloft, snorting and grunting with exertion as the tip of his finger increasingly shakes. As he suffers for the viewer, the viewer suffers with him, and it becomes exhausting to watch his exertion. With no catharsis or conclusion, the tape ends before his arm gives out. As much as Acconci points out at the viewer, he also points to the apparatus that makes this connection possible. Neither he nor the audience is the center of this system. Both are decentered in a network of multiple centers where connection is mediated by various kinds of spatial and temporal distance. Acconci wants viewers to feel the blindness of the televisual eye, whose typical uses, whether for broadcasting or surveillance, prohibit dialogical connections between senders and receivers. He suffers so that his viewers might consider their own subjectivity in media ecologies where they sympathetically respond to phatic exhortations that are both empathetic and full of pathos precisely because they reach out to touch an audience that can only feel them in absentia.

Acconci turned to live performance at the Performances and Activities series with *Pryings*, an equally painful work to watch.¹¹⁰ As with Graham's TV *Camera/Monitor Performance*, the audience could contrast the live performance with its televisual representation, which included them on-screen, in the work itself.¹¹¹ Along with the general problem of the mediated body, Graham and Acconci were responding to second-wave feminism by addressing the mediation of masculinity and the normative limits of gender identity.¹¹² *Pryings* was a battle of the sexes designed for live television. Its script is simple. A male performer (Acconci) attempts to pry open the eyes of a female performer (his girlfriend, Kathy Dillon), who attempts to shut them, while a video camera operator (Bernadette Mayer) remains focused on the female performer's face in close-up. For twenty minutes, the three performers stood on the floor of the auditorium, at the same level as the audience. An old-fashioned, wood-cabinet television sat on stage, receiving a closed-circuit feed from the camera. Members of the audience could watch the performers directly only if they could see them from where they were sitting. Otherwise, they watched the screen, where Dillon seemed especially



Vito Acconci, *Pryings* (1971)

violated and where they would make periodic appearances depending upon the camera angle. Dillon's face filled the screen in close-up as she struggled to keep her eyes closed. Acconci's body and hers were often pressed so closely together that at times they were cheek to cheek, his face in profile, hers facing the viewer, their struggle becoming a *pas de deux*. Because of Meyer's relentless probing, Dillon's face was kept centered on the monitor, and so she was doubly violated: by Acconci's prying hands and by the camera's prying eye. Acconci cast her in the role of the reluctant star who can't escape the glare of publicity. Closing in on itself, her face bunched up as she constantly shifted, turning away from the prying fingers and prying lens. She refused to open up and meet the camera's eye with her own. The whites of her eyes were occasionally visible as Acconci tugged at her lids, his hands molding her features into monstrous contortions as he demanded that she perform for the camera. With steadfast will, she refused to look at the camera and through it, out at the audience.

By situating the audience members between the live performance and its virtual reproduction, Acconci caught them between an actual act of violence and its virtual reproduction whose close-up made it all the more powerful. In giving precedence to the on-screen image, Acconci exaggerated the way in which television programming and the mass media in general assign women

roles as objects of desire. Dillon adamantly refused the imperatives of Acconci's ridiculously heightened masculine direction. Not wanting to play either seductress or whore, she denied Acconci and the camera's blank stare, and the identities both sought to assign to her. While she willingly participated in the performance, Dillon's personal relationship with Acconci added a charge to the piece that crossed the boundaries between public and private spheres. In her role as girlfriend, she also became the face of domestic violence and the struggle against such abuse. As audience members appeared in flashes on-screen, they were inscribed in Acconci and Dillon's power play, becoming visible witnesses to a violent act while politely remaining seated. They watched themselves watching a cartoonish display of gender roles not so far removed from typical network fare. As with *Selma Last Year*, they could see themselves consuming televised scenes of violence but were confronted by their own passivity in the face of such stereotypes.¹¹³

Acconci focused directly on the audience in later works addressing the mediation of gender roles. He further exaggerated masculine aggression by literally attacking his audience in *Claim*, a performance presented later in 1971 with Graham's assistance.¹¹⁴ Acconci ensconced himself in the basement of a loft, where he sat blindfolded for three hours at the bottom of the stairs. His stated goal was to claim the basement as his own, and he held a length of pipe that he used to bludgeon any visitors who tried to depose him. He set up a closed-circuit loop with a downward-pointing camera mounted above the stairs, connected to a monitor in the loft next to the basement door. The blindfold reinforced his inability to see his audience, absurdly mimicking the blindness of television's phatic address. By covering his eyes he made his audience disappear, objectifying it by literally replicating the kind of blind interaction between performer and audience that he explored in *Centers*. Rather than face the invaders as friends or colleagues, he could attack them as others, with impunity. He continually chanted, "I've got to make myself believe this" until finally he did, working himself into a highly agitated state. Visitors to the exhibition were invited to break the fourth wall and appear on the monitor in an attempt to claim the basement as their own. Thanks to the positioning of the camera, would-be invaders could be seen only on-screen from behind. They were hidden by the shadows, heightening the sense that they were faceless, inhuman assailants. Acconci viciously attacked all comers. He said afterward with no exaggeration that by the end of the performance he was ready to kill someone if necessary to keep control of



Vito Acconci, *Claim* (1971)

the basement.¹¹⁵ He had become the ultimate embodiment of masculinity as a state of mindless violence.

Upping the ante on the violence found on television programs from *Gun-smoke* to nightly news broadcasts showing footage of civil unrest and the war in Vietnam, Acconci conflated the virtual image of grievous bodily harm with its very local and real possibility. Adopting a hypermasculine identity, he defended his territory like a troll under a bridge or, more to the point in the Vietnam era, like a cold warrior engaged in a violent act of arbitrary spatial expropriation. In claiming the basement, he was also metaphorically claiming the airwaves as he vigorously defended his right to remain on-screen against anyone who came downstairs and tried to push him off-camera. He became a parody of the male authority figures who were defending establishment policies and reinforcing established gender roles night after night on television. And he turned the members of his audience into parodies of the erstwhile media guerrillas who were attempting, often with similar aggression, to overthrow “the system.” Through an exaggerated masculine imperative, he reduced the public sphere to a network of brutality, the people to an insurrectionary mob, and news hosts to potential murderers willing to kill to maintain their share of the airwaves.

In several later single-channel, black-and-white videotapes, Acconci turns

from violent revolution to the subtler forms of persuasion found in televisually mediated seduction. Building on *Centers*, in these works he looks out at the audience in an attempt to woo viewers despite the fact that they remain forever anonymous to him. In *Undertone*, from 1973, he sits at the far end of a table whose front edge is aligned with the bottom of the screen, as if his viewers were directly across from him. He alternates between addressing the audience and closing his eyes, talking to himself. When talking to viewers he constantly beseeches them to keep watching him, saying over and over again, "I need you to be there, I need you to keep looking at me." He wants nothing more than to feel that someone is out there, voyeuristically watching him. This is less a parody of talkback than once again a critique of the public persona of television hosts, nearly all of whom at the time were men. Unlike these men, he admits his inability to see or know who is watching and is anxious to connect with viewers, particularly female viewers. When talking to himself, he puts his hands under the table, massaging his thighs in a masturbatory way, saying to himself that he wants to believe that there's a girl under the table, or no girl under the table, or even that you, the viewer, are under the table. He unmasks the television host, revealing a seamy, narcissistic undercurrent of desire lurking behind the usual poise of the television presenter. In Acconci's hands, the immediacy of connecting through the television screen is reduced to a sexual transaction whose heterosexual fantasy is clearly predicated on absence. The host becomes a male narcissist who, in his exhibitionism, desperately reaches out to connect with a female voyeur who exists only in his fantasies. Acconci appears just slightly less desperate in *Theme Song* (1973), in which he lies on the floor in extreme foreshortening. Stretched out toward the viewer with his face nearly pressed up against the screen, he entreats his audience like a pitchman, selling himself as the product. He calls out, "Don't you wanna come in here? Sure, sure you'll come in here . . . Look at me with your eyes. I'll look at you . . . Why don't you come in with me?" Watching this absurdly exaggerated seduction, audience members know that they aren't special, however emphatic his inducements. In both pieces, viewers can't help but bridle against the "you" he uses as a means of addressing the audience and feeling the tension between their own genders and sexual orientation and their constitution en masse as recipients of his insistently heteromascuine entreaties.

Graham offered a less bombastic reading of mediated gender roles in *Two Consciousness Projection(s)*, made in 1972. Graham claims to have avidly read



Vito Acconci, *Undertone* (1973)



Vito Acconci, *Theme Song* (1973)

the writings of Margaret Mead as a teenager, when, looking for information on sex, he discovered the sociology of gender. *Two Consciousness Projection(s)* neatly combines Mead's study of gender roles in books such as *Male and Female* with Gregory Bateson's theory of ecologically expanded mind by engaging with the ways in which gender is "in formation" in contemporary media ecologies.¹¹⁶ Like Acconci, Graham added the audience into the equation, creating a teledynamic environment in which two consciousnesses, one male and one female, were self-consciously observed by viewers, who were included in a closed-circuit loop. As it was performed on a number of occasions through the mid-1970s, a man and a woman faced off in front of an audience with a closed-circuit system between them.¹¹⁷ The man stood behind the camera, looking through it at the woman. She sat facing the monitor, looking at herself as her image was transmitted in real time to the screen. Members of the audience sat behind the woman, and they too were captured by the camera and appeared on screen. The piece began with the woman "subjectively" describing the content of her consciousness by saying whatever came to mind. The man then "objectively" described the woman as closely as possible by detailing his perceptions about her. From the audience's perspective, the male performer was hidden behind the camera while the woman was visible from behind and through her on-screen image.

Graham writes that as the audience watched, "a field [was] created in which audience and performers place[d] reciprocal controls on the other."¹¹⁸ The performers continued to alternate their descriptions for an unspecified period of time, projecting their consciousnesses outward, thereby affecting each other and the audience, and so their further acts of description. The audience could compare what the performers were saying with how the woman's appearance coincided with or diverged from her image on-screen. The audience members' presence affected the performers through their various responses, whether silence, laughter, coughing, or shifting in their seats. Graham says that as part of an ecological whole, the performers and the audience became extended superegos for each other, palpably melding into a larger mind in Bateson's sense of the word.¹¹⁹ The result of this exchange was that the stereotype of disinterested masculine observation and self-centered female narcissism was undermined. The male performer played the role of the detached, scientific observer. The female performer played the role of the emotive, even emotional, subject. The observer is typically more powerful in such a clichéd dynamic, which, Mead would have agreed, long dominated

stereotypical distinctions between Western men and women. But Graham subtly upended this cliché. Because the female performer was the only one in the entire ecology who could speak about herself, she had the power to express what it felt like to be pinioned between the male director and the audience. She was the only one in the installation who was in control of her own self-descriptions. Instead of being objectified, her private inner world was translated into an outward assertion of public subjectivity. Transformed from an object into a subject, she became the face of confessional, televised femininity, both exposing and overturning the objectification of women in the mass media at a moment when consciousness-raising was being co-opted by broadcasters like Phil Donahue. Graham later staged the piece in the nude, with the literally exposed sex of the performers complementing their performance of gender. Although no videotape of the nude version remains, one can easily imagine the performers focusing on how awkward their nudity was, particularly the woman, who couldn't hide behind the camera and whose body was now also revealed for the audience's predilection. Graham referred to such works as "learning processes," the lesson being that if men and women both have their parts to play on screen, so does the audience, which appears in *Two Consciousness Projection(s)* as a third consciousness.¹²⁰ Although usually off-screen, the audience's on-screen presence secured these roles by visibly feeding back into the media ecosystems of which it was also clearly a part. The performance mirrored the mass media's representations of gender in such a heightened way that it made the clichés of how men and women typically behave on-screen painfully obvious. By including the audience on-screen, Graham put its members in the awkward position of having to acknowledge their own relationship to these clichés and how they themselves may have acceded to them.

►► Graham further pursued the role the audience plays in the reception of television in a series of room-sized teledynamic environments and related work designed for cable television. The year 1974 marked a high point in Graham's productivity. That year he designed well over a dozen ambitious, large-scale closed-circuit installations, generating ideas that would carry him through the rest of the decade.¹²¹ Many of these were variations on what he called "time delay rooms." These were small, laboratory-like rooms that incorporated live and delayed closed-circuit television, often in conjunc-

tion with mirrored walls. Audience members became performers simply by entering them. Graham built the rooms for small groups of viewers to interact with each other and with the effects generated by their technological setups. The rooms were much sparer than those found in Frank Gillette's video exhibition of the year before, containing only the visitors themselves, closed-circuit television, and occasionally mirrors and microphones. The first of these projects was *Present Continuous Past(s)*, in which mirrors added to the sense of estrangement the closed-circuit delay created by causing the image on the monitor to be reversed upon each of its reflections. Viewers' images echoed strangely into the past, creating a sensation that was the visual equivalent of smoking pot. *Time Delay Room 1* had two rooms and no mirrors. Cameras placed high on the walls captured the backs of viewers. Upon entering the first room, viewers saw the group of people in the second room live on one monitor and in an eight-second time delay on the other. Moving into the second room, they saw the first room live on one monitor and a delayed image of the room they'd just entered on the other. By entering the second room, they could watch what happened after they left that room and see how the people in the second room had accommodated their entry. By moving back and forth, they could play with their shifting positions in a mediated social field. Other variations included an observer in a third room who commented over live microphone on the visitors' behavior, as well as the use of slow motion to increase the room's druglike ambience. Graham designed several of these pieces for installation in specific, non-gallery settings, including a suburban home, an office building, and a shopping mall.

The critic and editor Friedrich Heubach wrote one of the most incisive accounts of Graham's time-delay rooms when they were made. Heubach suggested that in calling attention to the phenomenology of visibility (and not just vision), Graham was examining the social construction of the self. Graham split viewers from their self-image so that they could experience the ways in which "relating oneself to one's image is a social condition."¹²² He wanted viewers to recognize that there is no inherent self to unite with, but only an endless series of internally and externally reproduced images that create a sense of self by circulating "in formation" relative to the various media ecologies in which contemporary selves exist. Via closed-circuit television as well as mirrors, subjective observers were transformed into the object of observation in relation to others as well as themselves. "There is no distinction between subject and object," Graham himself wrote. "The object is the

viewer, the art . . . the subject is the viewer, the art.”¹²³ He wanted viewers to recognize that even their seemingly “subjective” view of themselves and the world is an effect of networks of communication in which they function as objects for others and that visibility itself is a function of technologies like television, the newest mirror to mediate subjectivity.

In his cable television works, Graham would explicate the specific ways in which television news formed just such a posthuman, sociotechnical communication ecology. Among the last gasps of early video art along with Video Trans America, these projects began in 1971 but weren’t realized on cable until 1980. Graham’s interest was piqued by *Radical Software’s* coverage of cable’s rapid growth during the early 1970s. While the Videofreex ran their own micro-television cable network, Graham turned to public access programming. Seeking to secure a monopoly on the market in Manhattan, where cable allowed for better reception, and under pressure from groups such as Raindance, two fledgling cable companies, Sterling Information Services and Teleprompter, agreed to provide channels for public use. Alongside various types of commercial programming, public access cable debuted in New York City in 1971 with a show called “A Town Meeting on the Air.” The first topic was a self-reflexive discussion of the advent of public access to the airwaves via cable. In *Guerrilla Television*, Shamberg wrote that cable “promises to be the next public utility,” singling out public access as the most significant part of what cable could do.¹²⁴ The following year, the FCC officially mandated that all cable systems in the United States’ top one hundred markets leave at least one channel open for public use. These channels promised to bring a new kind of democratic populism to television in which the public could produce programs suited to their interests and investments.¹²⁵ Graham’s earliest cable work, which was one of his most idealistic pieces, focused on how the viewing audience contributes to the public sphere and how the people might be figured differently through democratic uses of television.

Graham’s *Project for a Local Cable* TV was never actually shown on cable. It was conceived in 1971 as a radical revision of the television news debate. He was able to realize it only in a classroom setting, using students as performers. Graham described the piece as follows. Two members of the viewing audience who hold representative opposing views on a subject of public debate are invited to the station to air their differences. They face each other, with a monitor in front of them, each holding a camera pointed at the other. As one describes her or his point of view, the other zooms in or out in order

to “reflect their feelings of subjective ‘distance’ from the other’s ‘position,’”¹²⁶ The participants alternate between speaking and zooming. The monitor each person watches contains the view from the other person’s camera, so that the speaker knows at any given moment how the other person feels about what she or he is saying. Graham ties the technical apparatus to the participants’ internal affective state, the zoom becoming a signal for the emotional position of one participant relative to the other. After giving their own points of view, they reverse positions and represent the other person’s point of view, continuing the process of emotive zooming. During the first two parts of the piece, a director switches between various camera views so that the audience sees alternating images of the performers. During the third and final part, the participants discuss the relative merits of each point of view with a split screen showing images from both cameras on the monitors, while the audience watches the same split-screen image. Television, as a mediating technology, is visibly tied to the substance of the debate itself. The participants are not the usual celebrity suspects sitting as guests of a typical host. There is no host, and the debaters are drawn from the community itself. The work depends on their opinions being tied to those of the home viewing audience. Graham’s performers appear on the air as an embodiment of the people engaged in democratic debate. In selecting his performers from the audience, he makes them surrogates for the home viewer, as if the home viewer had crossed the barriers erected by the one-way street of broadcasting and ratings and entered into the closed-circuit performance. The apparatus is as important as the participants’ points of view. While not able to participate directly, home viewers could see their opinions (or the opinions of their representatives) reflected as an ever-changing emotional Geiger counter registered by the pulse of the zooms, their television screens becoming a palimpsest of public opinion. Graham’s project transformed television from a popular medium into one that was truly populist inasmuch as its very image became tied to the audience’s intellectual and emotional struggle to unite as a people in relation to topics of public debate.

Graham’s next cable-related project, *Production/Reception (Piece for Two Local Cable TV Channels)* of 1976, never got beyond a proposal.¹²⁷ Graham described how, simultaneously with a normal commercial television broadcast, one cable channel would play the view and sounds of a control room where the program was being broadcast, and another would show the living room of a typical viewer’s home with the program tuned in but with audio

mixed together from the entire house to capture the other things the viewer was doing besides watching. Although his technique was very different from that of either Nam June Paik or the television guerrillas, Graham also wanted to allow viewers to produce their own program. Members of the audience could switch between the three views he presented by flipping between channels and making their own flow as they triangulated the show as it normally appeared on-screen, the broadcast network's production of the show, and another home's reception of it. These could all then be further compared with the viewer's own viewing experience. Using much simpler means than either Paik's synthesizer or the education programs developed by groups like Raindance, Graham wanted to give viewers a means of creating an analytic flow from these different points of view and contrasting them with their own environment. Generated on the fly, this new meta-program would operate against the immediacy of commercial broadcasting by unmasking the artifice of television programming. Graham wanted to transform his audience from a group of passive viewers into performers playing the role of sociologists observing television and reflecting on their own relationship to it. His project contrasted with contemporaneous installations by the video collective Telethon, such as *The Living Room Tableau*, from 1972, in which viewers were invited to sit on an overstuffed couch in an art gallery and watch a large television playing "edited collages of commercial programs."¹²⁸ In such installations, Telethon turned the experience of contemplative viewing offered by the art gallery into a simulacrum of the distracted viewing found in the typical U.S. home. Graham's project moved in the opposite direction. Meeting viewers where they lived, he wanted to get them off their couches by engaging with television in a Brechtian performance that would undermine the medium's conventions by revealing its conditions of production and reception.

Working in collaboration with Dara Birnbaum, Graham finally realized a related piece, *Local Television News Program Analysis for Public Access Cable Television*, in 1980.¹²⁹ Whereas TVTV and the Women's Video News Service sought to expand the boundaries of the content covered by the news, Graham and Birnbaum described their project as an "analytical, didactic deconstruction" of the conventions of news coverage.¹³⁰ They specifically targeted the "happy news program" in which local hosts bantered among themselves and home viewers, as if the senders and receivers of the program were familiar with each other. They revealed how the producers cast the news hosts in the role of a group of friends that mirrored the affability of domestic

receivership by transforming the studio space into a fictional reflection of the space in which the audience received the broadcast. The piece included a videotaped segment of a local news broadcast, a view from a local home where the same segment of the program was being watched, and a view of the control room shot as the segment was being produced. These “concurrent realities,” as Graham and Birnbaum called them, were then alternately inset against each other in a corner insert on the upper left quadrant of the screen.¹³¹ Throughout, the artists overlaid the images with textual commentary. Some was simply descriptive: “Lead story: local news.” Some was more proscriptive, suggesting a critical perspective on the social roles of television: “Early evening news broadcasts coincide for many with the time after work and before relaxation.”¹³² Since Graham and Birnbaum’s piece was aired at the same time as the local nightly news, home viewers could channel-surf between the two. In this way, they could produce their own meta-program by unnesting the boxes in which television news packages events as it both constructs and constrains the public sphere.

Graham and Birnbaum wrote that the biggest lesson they hoped their audience would learn was that “in the typical daily news program, unmediated immediacy is simply mythic.”¹³³ However much the news team seemed part of the viewer’s family life, it was there only at a virtual distance for the masses and never for anyone in particular. In the piece, the local family can be seen watching the show distractedly. The parents sort mail and the children run around playing, while images of the Iran hostage crisis and other news items are largely ignored. The newscasters’ joviality mirrors the family in its relaxed leisure state as unfolding historical events are framed by the networks in a way that seems intended to be either ignored or forgotten. There is no apparent investment in any particular news on the part of the family, certainly no agonism, let alone antagonism. Viewers could weigh their own watching behaviors and environment against those of the family they watched. At the same time, they could see the behind-the-scenes construction of the news image as the veil was lifted from its illusion of immediacy. In showing the broadcast from behind the scenes, Graham and Birnbaum revealed the friendly affect it generated to be a product not only of the happy news team but also of the continual labor of switching and image manipulation necessary for live television production. At the same time, they revealed the audience’s resistance to the information being communicated on-screen. In a reversal

of the one-way street, the media ecology they produced was one in which the people were both connected to top-down broadcasting and deflected its messages, swerving its information to their own ends. However much the newscast's producers attempted to mirror a family scene in order to capture the audience's attention, home viewers were shown to have their own agenda and the power either to ignore or, playing Graham and Birnbaum's game, to critically reflect on the media networks they tuned in and out of.

Graham and Birnbaum end their description of *Local Television News Program Analysis* by asking if their project can "be of cultural and political value to the community."¹³⁴ Having traveled a long way from Les Levine's cybernetic televisual organisms and Juan Downey's "post-political, erotic, mystic" view of television, they seem to have reached a dead end.¹³⁵ After this project they, like Downey, turn from creating teledynamic environments to producing rapidly edited, vibrantly colored single-channel videotapes. These tapes, which harkened back to Nam June Paik's and Stan VanDerBeek's earliest video collages, turned away from an interest in the audience and media ecology and became characteristic of the postmodern video art that dominated the 1980s.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, the answer to their question today is yes inasmuch as their work, along with that of Levine, Downey, and others, keeps the possibility of engaging new mediums with heightened ecological awareness alive. In the wake of both happenings and minimalism, the teledynamic environments created during the 1970s evoked a definition of the word "medium" not as an extension of humanity but as the culture from which subjectivity grows like cells in a petri dish. In so doing, these projects marked a significant moment when posthumanism was introduced to the art world, leading not only to the later development of postmodernism and the rise of identity politics but also to the emergence of new media art and tactical media. As a model for these subsequent movements, early video art contested the very nature of personhood by putting forward the notion that there is no "we, the people" beyond the communication networks in which the name of the public is invoked. Teledynamic environments as diverse as those found in Video Trans America or Graham's cable television projects grappled with how communication mediates community, demonstrating that being-in-common is a dynamic and forever contested process and that this contest will never be finally settled but is a continuous and necessary struggle. In the various ways these projects evoked media ecology, they

brought the experience of both manipulating the mass media and being manipulated by it to the inescapable attention of their audience. They made good on the promise that Neil Postman imagined, where the study of ecology, as engaged by artists, would reveal how contemporary subjectivity had become inescapably wedded to mediums of mass communication and how the people had become a product of the electronic networks through which they were increasingly being mediated.

CODA *THE APOTHEOSIS OF VIDEO ART*

►► Although he was referring to media reform in West Germany, Hans Magnus Enzensberger's closing words at Open Circuits can also be read as a summary of the final moments of the history of early video art. "Altogether, it is impossible to arrive at sweeping conclusions," Enzensberger said. "The politics of liberation have succeeded; the politics of liberation have failed. Both of these propositions could be defended, and both would ultimately appear meaningless."¹ In diverse ways, early video art successfully liberated television from its industrial uses in favor of an artisanal model of production that focused on contemplation and self-reflexive critique. The earliest artists who turned to television with liberatory politics in mind focused on increasing direct audience participation. USCO, Nam June Paik, Stan VanDerBeek, and others produced works in which viewers engaged with television in a variety of nontypical ways, whether by closing their eyes and meditating, creating their own video images, or using it as a platform for debating current events without talking heads as intermediaries. The work of the video collectives created alternative programming that was closer to mainstream network fare but was developed using alternative networks of production, distribution, and consumption. These alternative networks allowed for the airing of issues that would otherwise have gone unseen and unheard on television. The teledynamic video installations made in the context of postminimalism both surrounded and incorporated viewers, offering experiences that transformed televisual surveillance into opportunities for reflecting on the status of subjectivity and lines between self and other in an age that was quickly becoming dominated by electronic media.

By 1974 video art was well on its way to achieving its current ubiquity in the art world, and artists continue to emulate works of early video art today. But while video art is ever present at contemporary art exhibitions, at art fairs, and in museum collections, its true apotheosis in the art world came only decades later, and the effects of early video art on the commercial television

industry are difficult to measure. Certainly some of the formal developments of early video art were adopted in mainstream broadcasts, and teledynamic environments were utilized at business fairs, upscale amusement parks, and the like, but as Enzensberger noted about West Germany, the direct impact of early video on the television industry in the United States is impossible to isolate from other sources of change. There was one clear effect of the emergence of early video art: in freeing television from the commercial limits of network broadcasting and closed-circuit surveillance, artists opened the medium up to the commercial interests of the art world. Transformed into video art, television has become another salable fine-art commodity today. As Enzensberger's comments suggest, liberation from one set of conventions inevitably leads to the imposition of another.

To become fully canonized in the art world, video art had to develop a set of institutionally manageable conventions. Through the early 1990s it suffered from related exhibition and funding difficulties. The open reels that early video art relied on were able to withstand limited public screenings but were unreliable, to say the least, in extended exhibition settings. Video art was plagued with technical difficulties, which scared off both private and institutional collectors. The only museums in the United States to build serious collections of video art starting in the 1970s were the Museum of Modern Art, the Long Beach Museum, and the Whitney Museum of American Art. During the 1970s and early 1980s much video art was made directly or indirectly with government funding through state grants like those offered by the New York State Council on the Arts or with the support of public television, but these dried up by the early 1980s thanks to budget cuts. Attempts were made, by Electronic Arts Intermix, Castelli-Sonnabend Videotapes and Films, art/tapes/22, and a few other organizations, to distribute and sell artist's video works during this time, but video art had marginal commercial value in comparison with mediums such as painting, sculpture, and even photography. Although there was hope that the widespread use of videocassettes would lead to a mass market in artists' video, this never came to be; avant-garde art proved resistant to mass audiences. And while museums started to collect video art in the early 1970s, for a long time it remained in the institutional basement. This was literally true, for example, at MoMA, where it was regularly exhibited only in a subterranean gallery, but it was true more broadly because video art was considered less aesthetically and economically valuable than work made in other mediums. While the cura-

tor Bill Horrigan refers to the 1980s as “the golden years of video [art]” and cites an admirable number of works made in that decade, he admits that during this time, when the National Endowment for the Arts was one of the few reliable funding sources, it barely supported video art and that video art lacked robust gallery support because it was unprofitable.²

Video art returned to widespread exhibition, particularly gallery exhibition, in part thanks to the emergence of more reliable technology in the form of laserdiscs and DVDs.³ A disruptive technology, laserdiscs hit the art world in the early 1990s, heralding a second explosion of video art. Although prone to scratching, disc-based media are considerably more durable than those based on magnetic tape. In the early days, their life span was unknown, but the purportedly lossless migration of digital information offered greater hope for the longevity of art works than the lower-fidelity transfers of analog tape. As with the commercial success of avant-garde photography, discs could be reliably editioned in extremely limited quantities, thereby creating inflated value through artificial scarcity. Barbara Gladstone pioneered this technique relative to video art by selling limited-edition laserdiscs of Matthew Barney’s work, which he turned into collectible icons by decorating them and placing them in sculpted vitrines. Another key feature of digital video is that it can reliably be set to automatically play in a loop. This technique is well suited to the art gallery, given its long-standing relationship to atemporal mediums. The length of short pieces, several minutes in duration, approximates the amount of time typical gallery-goers can spend in front of a painting or sculpture without losing their patience.

The last bit of technology aiding video art’s second flowering during the 1990s was the affordable, reliable digital video projector. Artists had been using video projectors since the mid-1960s, but they were expensive, unwieldy, and hard to acquire, and multichannel works using monitor banks were equally expensive and difficult to store and maintain. With their decreased cost and increased reliability, digital video projectors solved the exhibition-related problems of the crowding of a large number of people around a tiny video monitor and the use of costly projectors or monitor banks. When shown at the larger scale that projection afforded, video art could compete with mural-sized paintings and gallery-filling sculptural installations. By the end of the 1990s, the conventions of the gallery as black box—featuring quasi-narrative, disc-based loops of relatively short duration, sometimes alone but often in combination, screened in a darkened room and filling an

entire wall if not multiple walls—led to the viral spread of video art. Most of the artists working with television had long ago abandoned any interest in the immediacy of live television and instead sought an experience more akin to Hollywood cinema, adopting the approach that Vilém Flusser had dismissed at Open Circuits. For Flusser, this approach signaled a turn away from the political potential of television in favor of immersive spectacle. Over the course of the 1990s, computer graphics and digital projection definitively transformed theatrical cinema, leading to the rise of the CG blockbuster and the death of celluloid as a medium for film.⁴ Arising in parallel with digital cinema, the black box gallery became the new symbol of artistic contemporaneity in the art world and featured its very own blockbuster artists. Bill Viola and Gary Hill were early adopters of black box video installation, and their work has become canonical in the later history of video art. While Hill created high-tech installations but remained resolutely avant-garde in his approach, Viola became the Cecile B. De Mille of black box video by tackling subjects of religious and social profundity with broadly brushed public appeal. One of the most successful artists of his generation working in any medium, Viola represented the United States at the Venice Biennale in 1995 and had a retrospective that traveled around the United States and Europe in 1997. The decade also saw the debut of celebrated works by Mariko Mori, Jane and Louise Wilson, and Shirin Neshat, among many others, screened in one dark room after another, with production values that began to rival those of Hollywood.

If 1974 marks a significant first step toward the institutionalization of video art, then 2001 marks its apotheosis. A traveling exhibition of Neshat's work was organized by Musée d'art contemporain de Montreal and went on to three further venues in the United States.⁵ The 2001 Venice Biennale was so filled with video screening rooms that both Daniel Soutif and Robert Storr remarked that the art gallery had been transformed from a white cube into a black box, which was the first time this sentiment appeared in print. Soutif wrote that the exhibition marked not so much the apotheosis of video art as a form of cinema as "the sinister apotheosis of the remote control," recounting how traipsing from darkened room to darkened room filled with one video after another recalled indiscriminate, late-night channel surfing.⁶ With greater spleen and more rigorous theorization, Benjamin Buchloh says much the same in his essay "Control by Design":

This year's Venice Biennale was in many ways a showdown between new electronic technologies (in particular digital-video projections) and the media of painting and sculpture, with the latter on the defensive, if not in manifest retreat, from their traditional stronghold in this most venerable of biennials. Spectators frequently found themselves standing in line to enter claustrophobic spaces, halfway between movie house, darkened living room and Skinner box. . . . Exhibition value—the condition of the secularized modernist work as fully emancipated from cult value and myth—has been replaced by spectacle value, a condition in which media control in everyday life is mimetically internalized and aggressively extended into those visual practices that had previously been defined as either exempt from, or oppositional, to mass-cultural regimes.⁷

Soutif and Buchloh irrefutably identify a problem that emerged when black box video installation gained predominance and has continued unabated since. Traditionally art galleries were designed for the ambulatory viewing of atemporal objects, in opposition to theaters, which were designed for the seated viewing of temporal performances. The black box gallery strikes an uneasy compromise between the two that remains difficult to resolve. This is especially true when works of video art are shown in large quantities, with inadequate and uncomfortable seating, as is typical at large exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale. This problem has only grown worse in ensuing years with the “documentary turn,” which has led to video artworks of greater length and narrative complexity.⁸

In addition to voicing his grievances about contemporary video art's typical installation, Buchloh expresses concern that Enzensberger's worst fears have come to pass and the politics of control supported by the consciousness industry have won. Singling out Bill Viola's work at the Biennale for criticism, he writes that, in their embrace of video as an art form, art institutions have tamed the politics of early video art, turning its posthumanist populism into yet another means to perpetuate the great myths of humanism and capitalism. Buchloh's criticism was confirmed that same year when, nearly half a century after its earliest foray into television, the Metropolitan Museum of Art finally acquired its first work of video art, Viola's *Quintet of Remembrance* (2001), from a series he showed at the Biennale. These works feature groups of figures based on Renaissance paintings that move in ultraslow motion

while experiencing heightened states of emotion. Their high production values mirror both Hollywood and blue-chip paintings. Met curator William S. Lieberman said that he chose the work because it “relates so perfectly to [the] old masters.”⁹

Even before Viola’s piece went on display, *Forbes* magazine published a “Connoisseurs Guide [to] Collecting Video Art” heralding the price of Ne-shat’s video work (“up to \$40,000 at auction!”) as well as the Metropolitan Museum’s purchase of Viola’s work. Despite nagging problems with the potential obsolescence of the equipment and with conservation, the author writes that “video art is now one of the fastest-growing categories in contemporary art,” breathlessly noting that “large installations by the grand old men of video art like Bill Viola and Bruce Nauman easily run into six figures.”¹⁰ Instead of the art treasures being brought “to you” via television, as had been done at the Metropolitan Museum long ago, television had become a lure to bring audiences raised on its spectacle into the museum. The artists who made early video may have set out to recast art world institutions in a different mold, but video art most successfully liberated television (financially if not otherwise) by transforming it into a treasure worthy of any art collection made by newly minted old masters. The apotheosis of video art brought changes to art institutions but not of the kind imagined by the liberation politics of the New Left. For Soutif, Buchloh, and others, video art had succeeded only by diminishing its critical distance from industrial television. Rather than escape from their living rooms, people now go to museums to replicate their living room experience (although galleries tend to be far less comfortable). Witness how readily visitors to contemporary art exhibitions flock to darkened video rooms, planting themselves there far longer than they would in front of non-time-based works. Instead of transforming television into a contemplative viewing experience distinct from everyday life, the black box video art frequently found in museums is closer than ever to home television viewing, which is itself closer than ever to going to a movie theater. Thanks to the large, flat-screen, high-definition sets found at home and in the gallery, both art galleries and living rooms now offer quasi-cinematic experiences. This convergence is reinforced by the narrative turn found in so much contemporary video art whose long, convoluted structures reflect the sophisticated storytelling techniques used in the programs offered today by cable networks and streaming services.

However domesticated television might have become in the art world,

even museum-sanctioned video art projects by highly regarded artists can retain critical bite and offer the opportunity for reflection. In 2008, thirty-odd years after the Open Circuits conference, video art left MoMA's basement in spectacular fashion when Pipilotti Rist's *Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)* filled the museum's titanic new atrium with more aplomb than any other installation to date.¹¹ Rist's piece focused on the stakes of distraction in relation to contemporary media culture. Far larger than anything viewed at home, twenty-five-foot-high candy-colored video projections enveloped the atrium, whose size is referenced in the work's subtitle. The videos' projectors and speakers were housed in enormous nipple-like protuberances sprouting from the walls. In the center of the space sat a giant circular couch on an even bigger carpet where tired museum visitors sprawled body-to-body. Without calling for a return to a mythic past, Rist harnessed Ovidian themes in order to playfully inject a wild but nonreductive feminism into the heart of modern art's greatest bastion. Towering images of a nude woman capered above the audience. Already of tremendous scale, she was all the more imposing because Rist shot her from a worm's-eye view with a fish-eye lens. The woman ate flowers and dug for earthworms. She got down on all fours, snuffling across a verdant field with animalistic fervor, her image fading into that of a boar. Floating in an amniotic sea that turned the color of menstrual blood, she seemed to return to the womb as she disappeared into a field of red. The images were often reflected and mirrored, causing recognizable imagery to fold into abstract patterns like those of the images found in earlier forms of synthesized video. Bodies became foliage, animals, and colored patterns of light circulating with viscous plasticity. Through these transmogrifications, Rist used video projection to colonize one of the most spectacular museum lobbies in the world, slyly lobbying for the inclusion of feminist subjects in the art world's canon and other institutions. In a move that a perceptive viewer might very well find shocking, she offered a seductively playful spectacle of monstrous and unbounded femininity that effectively countered the kinds of female objectification and the cult of feminine beauty that artists like Vanessa Beecroft continue to uphold and whose roles remained otherwise inescapable in the world of the mass media.

Yet many people in the atrium were seemingly immune to the power of Rist's video. They lounged, lost in conversation with friends, or watched through the lens of their cameras while shooting a selfie or personal video, or watched something else altogether on their iPhones, which had been released



Pipilotti Rist, *Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)* (2008)

the year before and were in evidence as harbingers of the future of video. As often as not, the deeply affective images filling the room were being ignored or consumed in various states of distraction. In fact, it was quite difficult, given the hustle and bustle of the atrium, to consume *Pour Your Body Out* with anything close to contemplative absorption. Although used as an exhibition space, the museum's atrium is really a passageway. Rist disguised this with the couch and the carpet, turning the atrium into a conspicuous display of contemporary media consumption. She created a hospitable space, and the public was happy to take advantage of the comforts she offered. Years earlier, during the heyday of early video art, Gregory Battcock had suggested that "portability" was the key limiting condition of television, and in the long term he was right. At the moment of video art's apotheosis via the black box, television was being remediated as yet another form of online information to be accessed by laptops and cell phones, which are far more portable than all but the smallest sets that were available during the 1970s.

Just as "video" was beginning to be used to describe online moving images, Rist managed to capture the new forms of portable distraction that were quickly becoming the norm, even in the formerly contemplative precincts of the museum. She put the audience on display as a distracted collective engaged in communion with multiple screens, including those in their own possession. Walter Benjamin once described distraction as an active condition, writing that absent-minded viewing held critical potential by offering a kind

of contemplation in distraction.¹² From the perspective of the present, one can imagine that, while restlessly distracted minds might fall prey to states of benumbed passivity, they also have the capacity to travel quickly across disparate kinds of information, making connections, linking diverse ideas, and connecting with the radically other. The age of digital media has clearly fulfilled many of the dreams of the critics and artists who were involved in developing early video art; the mass media is now more participatory and populist than ever, and anyone who can afford a cell phone can become a media manipulator. But while the people lounging in Rist's environment were clearly liberated from the one-way street of older forms of mass media, it was unclear whether they were instead being delivered into a new kind of bondage that kept them from communing with even the most thoughtful and seductive works of electronic art.

As its title indicates, *Pour Your Body Out* acknowledged the ways in which contemporary viewers pour themselves not only into works of art or physical institutions such as museums, but also into the many electronic devices that were in evidence at the installation, from audio guides and iPods to cell phones, cameras, and camcorders. While the woman frolicking above their heads was playing at becoming nature, many of the viewers below inhabited bodies that were lost in the second nature of technology to such an extent that they couldn't absorb the screened images above them without the interposition of their own personal screens. Some members of the audience were undoubtedly making connections between Rist's work and bits of relevant information using their personal electronic devices. Others were off in their own world, shut down rather than open to communion with her vision of radical otherness. At just the moment that video art had finally ascended to the most storied halls of the art world, television, transformed into the streaming of digital video now available as one among many immediately accessible information streams, was slipping through its fingers. If the black box was problematic from its inception, since 2008 it has begun to feel archaic, but once conventions are enshrined they become difficult to change. Almost a decade after *Pour Your Body Out*, the black box still dominates the art world's understanding of how video art should be shown, and it remains to be seen how artists will work against the immediacy of the devices we clutch so tightly today.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Dara Birnbaum and Cory Arcangel, "Do It 2," *Artforum*, March 2009, 192.
2. Neil Postman, founder of the field of media ecology, used the term "soft revolution" to define significant reformist challenges to a given system by those who feel disenfranchised. Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, *The Soft Revolution: A Student Handbook for Turning Schools Around* (New York: Delacourte Press, 1971). For more on Postman and early video art, see chapter 4, this volume.
3. It aired on station KVII-TV channel 7, thanks to the station owner and art collector Stanley Marsh.
4. According to Serra, he sent a copy to the U.S. government, which granted it official certification as an "anti-advertisement" to be aired publicly under the equal time rule, one of several provisions designed to give the people a broader voice on the airwaves. Richard Serra, *Writings Interviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 74.
5. Early video art circulates far beyond the museum galleries where it's frequently shown today as part of permanent collections and in retrospective exhibitions. Its influence can be seen in online works such as *YouTube Delivers People*, created by a user named "Vidyohistory" (a.k.a. Patrick Carrie), and at sites such as UbuWeb, which has an always accessible collection of early video art and its progeny that rivals that of any museum. See <https://youtu.be/SLjKvY1SjeI>; ubu.com.
6. Deborah Solomon, "Media Studies: Questions for Umberto Eco," *New York Times Magazine*, November 25, 2007; Umberto Eco, *Turning Back the Clock: Hot Wars and Media Populism* (New York: Harcourt, 2006).
7. Eco, *Turning Back the Clock*, 129.
8. Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (New York: Verso, 2005), 153.
9. Ibid., 125. My understanding of democratic populism differs slightly from Laclau's. For Laclau, all populist demands are democratic, including those made by demagogues. But relative to Laclau's own argument in this quote, demagogues are not underdogs, nor are their demands egalitarian. Rather, they promote nondemocratic forms of governance in the name of democracy.

10. Nicholas Johnson, *How to Talk Back to Your Television Set* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), 17.

11. For histories of television, see Erik Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Albert Abramson, *The History of Television: 1949–2000* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007); and Gary R. Edgerton, *The Columbia History of American Television* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). For art histories of video art, see Yvonne Spielmann, *Video: The Reflexive Medium* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008); and Chris Meigh-Andrews, *A History of Video Art* (New York: Berg, 2006).

12. Spielmann, *Video: The Reflexive Medium*, 81–82.

13. Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1967).

PRELUDE OPEN CIRCUITS

1. The conference ran from January 23 to 25, 1974.

2. “Canvass” in the original. Nam June Paik, *Video 'n' Videology, 1959–1973* (Syracuse, NY: Everson Museum of Art, 1997), 11.

3. Gregory Battcock, “Explorations in Video,” *Art and Artists*, February 1973, 22.

4. Paul Stitelman, “Observations on the Open Circuits Conference,” in Douglas Davis and Allison Simmons, eds., *The New Television: A Public/Private Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977), 102.

5. *Art Now 74: A Celebration of the American Arts* (Washington, DC: Artrend Foundation, 1974).

6. *Kunst bleibt Kunst* (Cologne, 1974), 9.

7. Melinda T. Wortz, “Collector’s Video,” *Artweek*, June 15, 1974.

8. Organized by Douglas Davis, Fred Barzyk, and Gerald O’Grady, the prospective exhibition included a section on the history of television as well as a selection of artists’ videotapes. The tapes would have been shown both at the museum, on several installation-sized, multiscreen video walls, and on Manhattan cable television. Projected costs were estimated at \$270,000, an extraordinarily high figure for an art exhibition, even today.

9. Ben Portis, “Douglas Davis at Open Circuits,” <http://www.eai.org/supportingDocumentView.htm?id=382&from=sr>.

10. Douglas Davis and Allison Simmons, Preface to Davis and Simmons, eds., *The New Television*, n.p.

11. Frank Gillette and Robert Pincus-Witten, “Panel Remarks,” in Davis and Simmons, eds., *The New Television*, 69.

12. Douglas Davis, *Art and the Future: A History/Prophecy of the Collaboration between Science, Technology and Art* (New York: Praeger, 1973).

13. Meyer Schapiro, "The Liberating Quality of the Avant-Garde," *Art News* 56, no. 4 (1957): 40.
14. *Ibid.*, 41.
15. *Ibid.*, 40.
16. *Ibid.*, 41.
17. The reasons include the Oedipal rejection of the previous generation's claim to fame; the rising reputation of Marcel Duchamp and the readymade among artists starting in the late 1950s; the increased accessibility of semi- and nonprofessional mass media technologies (8mm and 16mm film, Xerox machines, portable videotape systems); as well as the optimistic vision of technological progress promoted by the Kennedy administration.
18. John Heilpern, "The Fantasy World of Warhol," *Observer* (1966): 11.
19. John Margolies, "TV—the Next Medium," *Art in America*, September–October 1969, 50.
20. Davis, *Art and the Future*, 88, 90.
21. *Ibid.*, 90.
22. Given the many later claims made for posthumanism inside and outside the art world, Davis's statement seems considerably less farfetched today than it did circa 1970. Against the naysayers found even within the art world, the artists who were working with television were indeed reflecting, if not helping to define, a posthumanist understanding of subjectivity in which technologies, bodies, and identities were seen to be part of imbricated ecological networks. *Ibid.*, 187.
23. John Baldessari, "TV (1) Is Like a Pencil and (2) Won't Bite Your Leg," in Davis and Simmons, eds., *The New Television*, 110.
24. Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4: *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993), 85.
25. *Ibid.*, 86.
26. Battcock, "Explorations in Video," 22.
27. E.g., Douglas Davis, "Filmgoing/Videogoing: Making Distinctions," in *Video Culture: A Critical Investigation* (Rochester: Gibbs M. Smith, 1986), 270–273; David Antin, "Video: The Distinctive Feature of the Medium," in *Video Art* (Philadelphia: Falcon Press, 1975), 58–72; Rosalind Krauss, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," *October*, no. 1 (1976): 51–64; Anne Wagner, "Performance, Video and the Rhetoric of Presence," *October*, no. 91 (2000): 59–80; David Joselit, *Feedback: Television against Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).
28. Battcock was ultimately proved right given the widespread embrace of video on laptops and cellphones today. See the coda of this volume for more on this.
29. "Far-Off Speakers Seen as Well as Heard Here in a Test of Television," *New York Times*, April 8, 1927.

30. Ibid.
31. Robert E. Lee, *Television: The Revolution* (New York: Essential Books, 1944), 89.
32. "Bigtime Television," *Life*, December 6, 1948, 131.
33. Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999); William Kaizen, "Live on Tape: Video, Liveness and the Immediate," in *Moving Images: From Cinema to the Museum* (London: Afterall, 2008), 258–272.
34. Nam June Paik, "The Video Synthesizer and Beyond," in Davis and Simmons, eds., *The New Television*, 40.
35. Robert C. Morgan, ed., *Bruce Nauman* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 268.
36. Jud Yalkut, "Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider: Parts I and II of an Interview," *Radical Software* 1, no. 1 (1970): 9, 10.
37. Dan Graham, *Video-Architecture-Television* (Nova Scotia: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1979), 62.
38. Vito Acconci, Interview with the author, June 20, 2002.
39. These are reproduced in Davis and Simmons, eds., *The New Television*.
40. Douglas Davis, "Video Obscura," *Artforum*, April 1972, 71.
41. Hollis Frampton, "The Withering Away of the State of the Art," in Davis and Simmons, eds., *The New Television*, 33.
42. Antin, "Video: The Distinctive Feature," 58–72; reprinted as "Television: Video's Frightful Parent, Part I," *Artforum*, December 1975, 36–45.
43. Antin, "Video: The Distinctive Feature," 62.
44. Gerald O'Grady, Interview with the author, May 10, 2010. Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *The Consciousness Industry: On Literature, Politics and the Media* (New York: Continuum / Seabury Press, 1974).
45. Ibid., 102.
46. Ibid., 100.
47. Ibid., 104.
48. Vilém Flusser, "Two Approaches to the Phenomenon, Television," in Davis and Simmons, eds., *The New Television*, 247.
49. Ibid., 244.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid., 245.
52. Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Television and the Politics of Liberation," in Davis and Simmons, eds., *The New Television*, 249.
53. Ibid., 250.
54. Ibid., 251.
55. Enzensberger, *The Consciousness Industry*, 113.
56. Enzensberger, "Television and the Politics of Liberation," 258.

57. Ibid., 256.

58. David James notes the difference between industrial cinema, or the monolithic work produced by Hollywood and its affiliates, and avant-garde cinema, made by individual producers in the manner of older forms of handicraft. A similar distinction can be made between commercial uses of television and video art. See David E. James, *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

59. Enzensberger, "Television and the Politics of Liberation," 258.

CHAPTER ONE PARTICIPATION TELEVISION

1. See Claire Bishop, ed., *Participation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); David Garcia and Geert Lovink, "The ABC of Tactical Media," <http://www.ljudmila.org/netttime/zpk4/74.htm>.

2. Irving Howe, "Notes on Mass Culture," in Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, eds., *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America* (New York: Free Press, 1957), 497.

3. Paul Lazarfeld and Robert Merton, "Mass Communication, Popular Taste and Organized Social Action," in Rosenberg and White, eds., *Mass Culture*, 464.

4. Gunther Anders, "The Phantom World of Television," in Rosenberg and White, eds., *Mass Culture*, 360; *Dissent* 3 (1956): 14–24.

5. Ibid., 363.

6. Gilbert Seldes, "The Public Arts," in Rosenberg and White, eds., *Mass Culture*, 74.

7. R. Buckminster Fuller, *Nine Chains to the Moon* (New York: R. J. Lippincott, 1938), 238. Along with McLuhan's, Fuller's thinking would significantly influence early video art. See chapter 3, this volume.

8. Harry D. M. Grier, "The Museum's Television Program," *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 36, no. 7 (1941): 150.

9. Ibid., 148.

10. Seldes, "Public Arts," 560.

11. Ibid., 561.

12. McLuhan credited Seldes in a panel discussion where they appeared together in 1960. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Me: Lectures and Interviews* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 34–43.

13. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, critical ed. (Corte Madera, CA: Ginko Press, 2003), 442.

14. Ibid., 445.

15. Ibid., 333.

16. Ibid., 414.

17. Ibid., 443; Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 63.
18. Marshall McLuhan, "Art as Anti-Environment," in *The Art World: A Seventy-Five-Year Treasury of Artnews*, ed. Barbaralee Diamonstein (New York: Rizzoli, 1966), 359.
19. Ibid., 358.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., 359.
22. Ibid., 358.
23. Ibid.
24. The report is partially reproduced as an appendix in McLuhan's *Understanding Media*.
25. Gerd Stern, "From Beat Scene Poet to Psychedelic Multimedia Artist in San Francisco and Beyond, 1948–1978: An Oral History Conducted in 1996 by Victoria Morris Byerly" (Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley, Bancroft Library, Regional Oral History Office, 2001).
26. Alfred Frankenstein, "A Landmark of a Flop," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 13, 1963.
27. Ibid.
28. Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Message: An Inventory of Effects* (New York: Touchstone, 1967), 44–45.
29. McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*, 63.
30. McLuhan and Fiore, *Medium Is the Message*, 67.
31. Frankenstein, "Landmark of a Flop."
32. McLuhan and Fiore, *Medium Is the Message*, 63.
33. Stan VanDerBeek, "Culture: Intercom and Expanded Cinema, A Proposal and Manifesto," *Film Culture* 40 (1966).
34. "Festival 1," *New Yorker*, December 4, 1965, 52.
35. John Gruen, *The New Bohemia: Art, Music, Drama, Sex, Film, Dance in New York's East Village* (New York: A Capella, 1990), 11, 16.
36. Grace Glueck, "Multimedia: Massaging Senses for the Message," *New York Times*, September 16, 1967.
37. Eleanor Lester, "Intermedia: Tune In, Turn On—and Walk Out?," *New York Times*, May 12, 1968.
38. Eleanor Lester "So What Happens after Happenings?," *New York Times*, September 4, 1966; McLuhan and Fiore, *Medium Is the Message*, 77. This was a position that McLuhan had first put forward in *Understanding Media* when he wrote, "With TV, the viewer is the screen" (418).
39. *Hubbub* press release, Anthology Film Archives, New York.
40. Jonas Mekas, *Movie Journal* (289), Anthology Film Archives, New York.

41. For accounts of the World, see Renata Adler, "Murray the K's World," *New Yorker*, April 16, 1966, 44–45; Robert Kotlowitz, "Pleasure Dome '66: The World of Murray the K," *Harper's Magazine*, July 1966, 96–100; Michelle Kuo, "Special Effects," *Artforum*, May 2008, 133–136.

42. A similar video projector was used in several performances at *9 Evenings: Theater and Engineering*, held earlier in 1966, which combined avant-garde performances with high-tech engineering. Robert Rauschenberg, Alex Hay, and Oyvind Fahlstrom used the video projector in their contributions. Fahlstrom directly addressed stultifying television viewing in his performance *Kisses Sweeter Than Wine*. Robert Whitman was also using projected video in his performances around the same time. Other nightclubs such as the Cheetah in Manhattan were beginning to feature television in various ways, but none as spectacularly as the World.

43. Adler, "Murray the K's World," 45.

44. Stern, "From Beat Scene Poet to Psychedelic Multimedia Artist."

45. Kotlowitz, "Pleasure Dome '66," 99.

46. *Ibid.*, 100.

47. Jonas Mekas, "USCO: Interview with Gerd Stern," *Film Culture*, no. 43 (1966): 3.

48. *Ibid.*

49. Davis, *Art and the Future*, 159.

50. Stern, "From Beat Scene Poet to Psychedelic Multimedia Artist."

51. They followed *We Are All One* with *Down by the Riverside*, held at the Riverside Museum, New York, later in 1966. The museum's collection of Asian antiquities heightened their connection to non-Western mystical traditions, but USCO soon dissolved over tension in the group on how best to unite spirituality and the mass media.

52. Jane Tamerin, "Sights and Sounds of the New Night Life," *New York Herald Tribune*, April 17, 1966; "Wild New Flashy Bedlam of the Discotheque," *Life*, May 27, 1966, 72–76.

53. Mekas, "USCO: Interview with Gerd Stern," 3.

54. The equipment weighed nearly 100 pounds and was more for use in makeshift studios than for portable field use.

55. "Pop Goes the Videotape," *Tape Recording*, September–October 1965, 19.

56. Thom Andersen, "Film: Camp, Andy Warhol," *Artforum*, June 1966, 58.

57. The footage is labeled with both names on two different boxes in the Andy Warhol Museum Archives, Pittsburgh.

58. "Pop Goes the Videotape," 18.

59. *From Stills to Motion and Back Again: Texts on Andy Warhol's "Screen Tests" and "Outer and Inner Space"* (North Vancouver: Presentation House Gallery, 2003), 28.

60. Ibid.
61. "Pop Goes the Videotape," 19.
62. In the transcription of the film, this line is "struck in the back of the neck." *From Stills to Motion*, 39.
63. Other than *Outer and Inner Space*, Warhol's sole piece of video art proper is the single-channel tape *Water* (1971). It features an unmoving, unedited black-and-white shot of the tank of the Factory's water cooler. People off-screen can be heard engaging in office chitchat. For more on Warhol's later video and television work, see John Hanhardt, *Andy Warhol's Video and Television* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1991).
64. Including *Outer and Inner Space* on at least one occasion. Ibid.
65. Jonas Mekas, *Movie Journal* (334), Anthology Film Archives, New York.
66. For a historical account see George English, "The Worst Is Yet to Come," *Fire Island News*, June 4, 1966. For a more recent account see "Expanded Arts [special issue]," *Film Culture*, no. 43 (1966): 12.
67. Victor Bockris and Gerard Malanga, *Up-Tight: The Velvet Underground Story* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2003).
68. Martha Gever, "Pomp and Circumstances: The Coronation of Nam June Paik," *Afterimage* 10, no. 3 (1982): 12.
69. Paik, *Videa 'n' Videology*, 11.
70. William Kaizen, "Computer Participator: Situating Nam June Paik's Work in Computing," in Hannah Higgins and Douglas Kahn, eds., *Mainframe Experimentalism: Early Computing and the Foundations of Digital Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 229–239.
71. Paik, *Videa 'n' Videology*, 59.
72. The exhibition ran from March 11 to 20. Paik had begun working on the ideas that would go into the exhibition in 1961, in a score titled *Symphony for 20 Rooms*, reprinted in Susanne Neuberger, ed., *Nam June Paik: Exposition of Music Electronic Television, Revisited* (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, 2009).
73. Davis, *Art and the Future*, 150.
74. Paik, *Videa 'n' Videology*, 47.
75. Neuberger, ed., *Nam June Paik: Exposition of Music Electronic Television, Revisited*, 24.
76. Paik, *Videa 'n' Videology*, 11.
77. See Nick Lyons, *The Sony Vision* (New York: Crown, 1976); Gene Smith, "Trial by Fire Tests New Sony TV Unit," *New York Times*, July 14 1966; Gene Smith, "\$995 Home TV Tape Recorder to Be Introduced Here by Sony," *New York Times*, June 9, 1965.
78. The documents pertaining to Paik and the festival are available in the collection of the Anthology Film Archives, New York.

79. This was likely footage of Paik's television set manipulations included on stage during the performance of John Cage's *Variations V* that took place a few months earlier.

80. This was something he'd done several months before at the New School for Social Research in New York, where he stood before an audience and performed using his video system and modified sets. Howard Junker, "The Underground Renaissance," *Nation*, December 27 1965, 540.

81. Gruen, *The New Bohemia*, 111.

82. Shot by Ernest Pintoff, it was part of the series *Experiments in Television*, which included programs by Jim Henson as well as Pintoff's *This Is Al Capp* (1970). For more on Moorman, see Joan Rothfuss, *Topless Cellist: The Improbable Life of Charlotte Moorman* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014).

83. Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

84. It is uncertain who wrote these notes; no author is listed. "Program Notes for 'Soft Transformations,'" *Aspen*, no. 6A (1967).

85. For more information on the role these stations played as sponsors of early video art, see Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970); Corot and Schneider, eds., *Video Art: An Anthology*.

86. "The Medium is the Medium—March, 1969," WGBH Archives, Boston.

87. Joan Marter, ed., *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957–1963* (Newark: Newark Museum, 1999), 134.

88. Nam June Paik, "Electronic Opera," Smithsonian Museum of American Art Archives, Washington, DC.

89. *TV as a Creative Medium* included work by Paik, Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider, Paul Ryan, Serge Boutourline, Earl Reiback, John Seery, Eric Siegel, Thomas Tadlock, Aldo Tambellini, and Joe Weintraub. In 1971 Wise closed his gallery and opened Electronic Arts Intermix, which focused solely on supporting video art. See chapter 3, this volume, for a discussion of Gillette, Schneider, and Ryan's contributions to the exhibition.

90. "The Medium: Taking Waste out of the Wasteland," *Time*, May 30, 1969, 74.

91. Richard Skidmore, "T.V. as Art," <http://www.eai.org/supportingDocumentView.htm?id=184&from=a.401.35>.

92. Thomas Tadlock's synthesizer, the Archetron, completed before Paik's, appeared in *TV as a Creative Medium*.

93. Paik, *Video 'n' Videology*, 55.

94. *Ibid.*

95. *Ibid.*, 59.

96. Paik conducted an earlier experiment with the synthesizer known as 9/23 for the

date it was created in 1969. Bits of 9/23 were incorporated into various other works, but the piece was never broadcast as a whole.

97. Now known as Avery Fischer Hall.

98. Riley had already developed this technique back in the United States using tape loops and an Echoplex effects filter. For more on the use of magnetic tape by minimalist composers, see Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 98–99.

99. Barbara Moore, *Action Theatre: The Happenings of Ken Dewey* (New York: Franklin Furnace Archive, 1987), n.p. Gerd Stern praised the piece as one of the best in the festival and later worked on re-creating it after Dewey died tragically in a plane crash in 1972.

100. Ibid.

101. For more on the Selma march and the mass media see Charles E. Fager, *Selma, 1965* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974); David J. Garrow, *Protest at Selma: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Voting Rights Act of 1965* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978).

102. While he obtained credentials as a journalist in order to gain access to the events, he seems not to have filed any official accounts of what took place.

103. Moore, *Action Theatre*, n.p.

104. Paik also wrote about racial identity in the mass media, and Stan VanDerBeek's *Violence Sonata* tackled race relations, both of which are discussed later in the chapter.

105. Grace Glueck, "Brooklyn Is Host to Intermedia '68," *New York Times*, March 9, 1968.

106. Aldo Tambellini, Statement by Aldo Tambellini as previously written in the *Seed*, 1964, <http://www.aldotambellini.com/video2.html>.

107. Fred Wellington, "Interview with Ken Dewey," *Film Culture*, no. 43 (1966): 3. The Lincoln Center version of *Selma* was shown during the festival, which took place from September 12 to 22, 1966. Photographs of the earlier installations of the exhibition in Chicago were placed on the walls in the lobby as well. Andrew Uroskie writes that the Lincoln Center installation was "in practical terms . . . an abject failure," but Dewey thought differently, as his comments below indicate. Andrew Uroskie, *Between the Black Box and the White Cube* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 230.

108. Wellington, "Interview with Ken Dewey," 3.

109. Ibid.

110. Ibid.

111. Ken Dewey, *An Odyssey out of Theatre*, ed. Peter Hulton, vol. 11: *Theatre Papers* (Devon: Dartington College of Arts, Department of Theatre, 1977), n.p.

112. Ken Dewey, "X-ings," in Mariellen R Sanford, ed., *Happenings and Other Acts* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 210.
113. "President's Review and Annual Report" (New York: Rockefeller Foundation, 1967), 142–143.
114. Paik, *Videa 'n' Videology*, 31.
115. *Ibid.*, 39.
116. *Ibid.*, 31.
117. *Ibid.*, 60.
118. For more on the movie-drome and VanDerBeek's work see Gloria Sutton, *The Experience Machine: Stan VanDerBeek's Movie-Drome and Expanded Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015).
119. VanDerBeek, "Culture: Intercom and Expanded Cinema," 16.
120. *Ibid.*, 16, 17.
121. *Ibid.*, 17.
122. Gerald Emanuel Stearn, ed., *McLuhan: Hot and Cool* (New York: Signet, 1967), 272.
123. Stan VanDerBeek, Letter to William S. Paley, March 8, 1966, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.
124. Stan VanDerBeek, Letter to Boyd Compton, February 9, 1966, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.
125. VanDerBeek, "Culture: Intercom and Expanded Cinema," 16.
126. Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974).
127. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hanna Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 257–258.
128. Robert K. Baker and Sandra J. Ball, *Mass Media and Violence* (Washington, DC: National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, 1969), iii.
129. Percy Shain, "Spectators Participated in Ch. 2's 'Violence,'" WGBH Archives, Boston.
130. *Ibid.*
131. *Violence Sonata* program, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.
132. Stan VanDerBeek, "A Rough Outline of the 'Violence Sonata' Concept for TV," Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.
133. Stan VanDerBeek, "After-thoughts-after," WGBH Archives, Boston.
134. *Ibid.*
135. Gerald O'Grady, "Stan VanDerBeek's 'Violence Sonata,' WGBH Archives, Boston.
136. Eleanor Roberts, "Ch. 2 *Violence Sonata* Like Bad LSD Trip," WGBH Archives, Boston.

137. S.A., "VanDerBeek's 'Violence' Invites the Views of Viewers," WGBH Archives, Boston.

138. VanDerBeek died in 1984 before the advent of the World Wide Web. Paik experimented with the Web before he died in 2006, although with limited results.

CHAPTER TWO TALKBACK

1. Baker and Ball, *Mass Media and Violence*, iii.
2. Harry J. Skornia, *Television and Society: An Inquest and Agenda for Improvement* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 15.
3. Ibid., 16.
4. Ibid., 141.
5. Herbert Hoover, "Recommendations for Regulation of Radio," <http://earlyradiohistory.us/1924conf.htm>.
6. Rolf B. Meyersohn, "Social Research in Television," in Rosenberg and White, eds., *Mass Culture*, 353.
7. Newton W. Minow, "Television and the Public Interest," <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/newtonminow.htm>.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Students for a Democratic Society, "Port Huron Statement," <http://coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~hst306/documents/huron.html>.
11. Todd Gitlin, "Sixteen Notes on Television and the Movement," *TriQuarterly*, no. 23/24 (1972): 338–339.
12. Ibid., 363.
13. Ibid.
14. Johnson, *How to Talk Back*, 85.
15. Ibid., 140.
16. Howard Junker, "The Greening of Nicholas Johnson," *Rolling Stone*, April 1, 1971, 32.
17. Johnson, *How to Talk Back*, 142.
18. Stewart Brand, a former member of USCO, began publishing the *Whole Earth Catalog* in 1968. See Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, The Whole Earth Network and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
19. Other members of Raindance included Paul Ryan, Ira Schneider, Jodi Sibert, Megan Williams, and Dean and Dudley Everson.
20. Untitled introduction, *Radical Software* 1, no. 1 (1970): 1.
21. Ibid.

22. Had it existed slightly later, it almost certainly would have been published electronically. Its full run is now available online at radicalsoftware.org.
23. Michael Shamberg, Review of *How to Talk Back to Your Television*, *Radical Software* 1, no. 1 (1970): 16.
24. Ken Marsh, "Alternatives for Alternate Media: People's Video Theatre Handbook," *Radical Software* 1, no. 2 (1970): 18.
25. Ibid.
26. Marsh, Interview with the author, September 20, 2012.
27. Ira Schneider, "Video Theatre," *Radical Software* 2, no. 5 (1973): 14.
28. Deirdre Boyle, *Subject to Change: Guerrilla Television Revisited* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 11.
29. Chloe Aaron, "The Video Underground," *Art in America* 59, no. 3 (1971): 75.
30. "Global Village," *Radical Software* 1, no. 1 (1970): 19.
31. Ibid.
32. The woman, who was struck by a rubber bullet, was permanently blinded and ended up touring the world to help raise money for the IRA.
33. In a Q&A included on the videotape version of *The Irish Tapes* from one of its broadcasts on WNET.
34. On the connections between the Black Panthers and the video collectives, see Boyle, *Subject to Change*; Parry D. Teasdale, *Videofreex: America's First Pirate TV Station and the Catskills Collective That Turned It On* (Hensonville, NY: Black Dome, 1999).
35. Michael Shamberg and Raindance Corporation, *Guerrilla Television* (New York: Holt, Reinhardt, Winston, 1971). *Radical Software* continued into a second volume when the academic publisher Gordon & Breach offered financial support.
36. Shamberg was one of the few contributors to early video art with substantial professional experience in the commercial mass media industry.
37. Shamberg and Raindance Corporation, *Guerrilla Television*, n.p.
38. Ibid., I: 29.
39. Shamberg, Review of *How to Talk Back*, 16.
40. Shamberg and Raindance Corporation, *Guerrilla Television*, II: 9.
41. Ibid., II: 37. This episode is also recounted by the British educator Brian Groombridge in one of the most insightful discussions of media populism and television written at the time, although his discussion is focused largely on the United Kingdom. Brian Groombridge, *Television and the People: A Programme for Democratic Participation* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972), 70.
42. Jerry Rubin, *Do It! Scenarios of the Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970).
43. Chris Burden would later enact his own guerrilla takeover of a television studio in his work *TV Hi-jack* (1972).

44. Shamberg and Raindance Corporation, *Guerrilla Television*, II: 46–48.
45. Ibid., II: 40–41.
46. Ibid.
47. In a speech delivered in 1970.
48. Richard M. Nixon, “The Great Silent Majority,” <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/richardnixongreatsilentmajority.html>.
49. Timothy Crouse, *The Boys on the Bus* (New York: Random House, 1972), 171–172.
50. Shamberg and Raindance Corporation, *Guerrilla Television*, II: 91.
51. Ibid., 95.
52. For more on Ant Farm, see Constance M. Lewallen and Steve Seid, *Art Farm: 1968–1978* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).
53. Shamberg and Raindance Corporation, *Guerrilla Television*, II: 95.
54. Beryl Korot, “Cable,” *Radical Software* 1, no. 2 (1970): 1–4.
55. For more details, see chapter 3, this volume, and Ralph Lee Smith, *The Wired Nation: Cable TV—The Electronic Communications Highway* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).
56. Teasdale, *Videofreex*, 209.
57. “Quadrennial Overkill,” *Newsweek*, July 24, 1972, 85–86.
58. On the precarity of early feminist video art and the Women’s Video Festivals, see Melinda Barlow, “Feminism 101: The New York Women’s Video Festival, 1972–1980,” *Camera Obscura* 18, no. 3 (2003): 3–39.
59. Carol Hanisch, “The Personal Is Political,” <http://scholar.alexanderstreet.com/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=2259>.
60. In Berkeley, a parallel video festival, organized by Video Free America and called “Tapes from All Tribes,” ran at the Pacific Film Archive. The organizers of the festivals traded tapes and showed them at their respective festivals. Founded in 1970 in San Francisco, Video Free America is one of the few early video collectives that continues today. See videofreeamerica.com.
61. Letter written to participants in the Women’s Video Festival, October 20, 1972, Vasulka Archive, www.vasulka.org.
62. Press release for the first Women’s Video Festival at the Kitchen, Vasulka Archive, www.vasulka.org.
63. Introduction to the catalog for the Women’s Video Festival, Vasulka Archive, www.vasulka.org.
64. Maryse Holder, “Women’s Video Festival,” *Off Our Backs*, October 1972, 18.
65. Julie Gustafson, Interview with the author, September 12, 2009.
66. Mary Jane Sherfey, *The Nature and Evolution of Female Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).
67. Kate Millet’s film *Three Lives*, which debuted at the first International Women’s

Film Festival, was an important precursor for Gustafson and other feminist video makers.

68. Gustafson says she was unaware of the Women's Video Festivals and didn't submit her work there. Gustafson, Interview with the author, September 12, 2009.

69. Susan Kleckner, Interview with the author, May 1, 2010; Wendy Appel, interview with the author, May 3, 2010.

70. One notable exception is Germaine Greer, "McGovern, the Big Tease," *Harper's Magazine*, October 1972, 56–71.

71. Holder, "Women's Video Festival," 18.

72. Appel, Interview with the author, May 3, 2010.

73. See <http://circuitous.org/scraps/combahee.html>; Michele Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (New York: Verso, 2015).

74. Gitlin, "Sixteen Notes on Television," 363.

75. See www.dctvny.org; Jesse Drew, "The Collective Camcorder in Art and Activism," in Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette, eds., *Collectivism after Modernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 94–113; DeeDee Halleck, *Hand-Held Visions* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).

CHAPTER THREE VIDEO ECOLOGIES

1. Joselit's *Feedback* is an exception in this regard. See Suzaan Boettger, *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); *Radical Nature: Art and Architecture for a Changing Planet, 1969–2000* (London: Barbican Gallery, 2009).

2. Neil Postman, "The Reformed English Curriculum," in Alvin C. Eurich, ed., *High School, 1980: The Shape of the Future in American Secondary Education* (New York: Pitman, 1970), 161.

3. When Postman was a graduate student at Fordham University, he met McLuhan and subsequently coined the term "media ecology." Most media ecology programs have been subsumed by communications programs today.

4. Postman and Weingartner, *Soft Revolution*, 145.

5. Postman, "Reformed English Curriculum," 163.

6. Jack Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture: The Effects of Science on the Sculpture of This Century* (New York: George Braziller, 1968), 312.

7. Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics, or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1961).

8. Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General Systems Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications* (New York: George Braziller, 1968); Berlanffy, "An Outline of General Systems Theory," *British Journal of the Philosophy of Science* 1 (1950), 139–164.

9. Ludwig von Bertalanffy, "The History and Status of General Systems Theory," *Academy of Management Journal* 15, no. 4 (1972): 415.
10. Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture*, 365.
11. *Ibid.*, 364.
12. Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
13. Collected in Jack Burnham, *Great Western Salt Works: Essays on the Meaning of Post-Formalist Art* (New York: George Braziller, 1974).
14. The terms "conceptual art" and "conceptualism" have eclipsed "postminimalism" as catchalls for art from this period. Robert Pincus-Witten, *Postminimalism* (New York: Out of London Press, 1977).
15. The essay became the basis for an exhibition of the same title he curated in 1971, featuring videotapes by Vito Acconci, Bruce Nauman, Dennis Oppenheim, and others. Willoughby Sharp, "Body Works," *Avalanche*, Fall 1970, 14.
16. Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture*, 371.
17. Burnham, *Great Western Salt Works*, 38.
18. *Ibid.*, 24.
19. Paik, *Video 'n' Videology*.
20. See Pamela M. Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004); Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).
21. Robert Smithson, *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 175.
22. The other artists were Robert Morris, Sol LeWitt, and Carl Andre. The proposal and letter are reprinted in *ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*, 56.
24. Smithson's wife, Nancy Holt, made numerous works using portable video, although not focused on closed-circuit surveillance. Smithson and Holt appeared together in her single-channel video piece *East Coast, West Coast* (1969). See Alena J. Williams, *Nancy Holt: Sightlines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).
25. Buckminster Fuller, Introduction to Youngblood's *Expanded Cinema*, 15–35. This is the same theme found in *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970).
26. Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, 78.
27. *Ibid.*, 260.
28. *Ibid.*, 41.
29. *Ibid.*, 42.
30. Robert M. Lipsyte, "TV Goes C-C," *New York Times*, April 7, 1963.
31. Andy Warhol designed a project called *Nothing Special* to take advantage of such

systems. It was a television program that was never produced, whose drama unfolded entirely as captured on an apartment building's closed-circuit surveillance cameras. See Branden Joseph, "Nothing Special: Andy Warhol and the Rise of Surveillance," in *CTRL SPACE: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

32. Youngblood's comments suggest that, relative to the history of early video art, single-channel videotapes were less radical than video installations because, however obscure or abstract, they were still too close to commercial programming. Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, 337–339.

33. *Ibid.*, 346.

34. Discussed in chapter 1, this volume.

35. In 1969 alone, he had twelve solo exhibitions.

36. This was the date given by Levine in a conversation with the author. In publications on his work, his video *Bum* has been dated to 1965, but discussions on the tape about Richard Nixon's 1968 run for president indicate that it may have been made later. Levine admits this is possible, although he believes it was definitely made before 1968. Les Levine, Interview with the author, February 4, 2010, and email exchange with the author, October 8, 2010.

37. *Slipcover* was on display at the Art Gallery of Ontario from September 23 to October 23, 1966. It traveled to the Architectural League in New York City the following year.

38. David Bourdon, "Plastic Man Meets Plastic Man," *New York*, February 10, 1969, 46.

39. As paraphrased in Thelma R. Newman, "The Artist Speaks: Les Levine," *Art in America* 57, no. 6 (1969): 87.

40. *Ibid.*

41. Les Levine, "For Immediate Release," *Art and Artists* 4, no. 2 (1969): 48.

42. Grace Glueck, "Closed-Circuit TV Makes a Bow as Art," *New York Times*, September 11, 1968.

43. *Ibid.*

44. Burnham, *Great Western Salt Works*, 42.

45. *Software* ran from September 17 to November 8. This exhibition overlapped with the Museum of Modern Art's related *Information* exhibition. *Information* was held from July 2 to September 20, 1970. For more on both exhibitions, see *Software: Information Technology—Its New Meaning for Art* (New York: Jewish Museum, 1970); Kynaston McShine, *Information* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970).

46. The title of the piece was a double entendre referring both to the signs labeled "A.I.R." hung on the outside of loft buildings to warn firemen about any "artists in

residence” and to “on the air” as used in live broadcasting. Levine also showed *Systems Burn-off X: Residual Software* from 1969.

47. Grace Glueck, “Jewish Museum’s Software Confusing,” *New York Times*, September 26, 1970.

48. See chapter 1, this volume.

49. Yalkut, “Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider,” 10.

50. Ibid.

51. Working with USCO and Ken Dewey, John Brockman had developed a similar expanded-cinema environment in 1967 for the Scott Paper Company to promote its new line of Confidets sanitary napkins. Based on USCO’s installation at the World, the exhibition featured multiple film and slide projections, but not video. “Modular Video Matrix,” *Radical Software* 2, no. 5 (1973): 19; Glueck, “Multimedia.”

52. Harvey Lloyd, Interview with Frank Gillette, Vasulka Archive, www.vasulka.org.

53. “Modular Video Matrix,” 19.

54. McLuhan was a self-proclaimed Catholic humanist, and Fuller won the Humanist of the Year award in 1969.

55. Arlo Raymond, “Media Ecology,” *Radical Software* 1, no. 3 (1971): 19.

56. Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

57. Bateson distributed copies of this text at the Princeton conference that Ryan and Gillette attended (as discussed later in the chapter). Ibid., 331.

58. Ibid., 316–317.

59. “Creative Imagination,” Archives of American Art, Washington, DC.

60. Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 459.

61. See Jurgen Ruesch and Gregory Bateson, *Communication: The Social Matrix of Psychiatry* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1951), ch. 8.

62. Paul Ryan, “Letter: *Radical Software* and the Legacy of Gregory Bateson,” *Art Journal* 68, no. 1 (2009): 68; Jud Yalkut, “Electronic Zen: The Alternate Video Generation,” vasulka.org/archive/Artists10/Yalkut,Jud/ElectronicZen.pdf.

63. Paul Ryan, “Self-Processing,” *Radical Software* 1, no. 2 (1970): 15.

64. Ibid.

65. Paul Ryan, Letter to Howard Wise, March 2, 1969, Archives of American Art, Washington, DC.

66. Ryan, “Self-Processing,” 15.

67. Stephanie Harrington, “TV: Awaiting a Genius,” *Village Voice*, May 29, 1969.

68. *Everyman’s Moebius Strip* illustrated Wilmer’s article. Harry A. Wilmer, “Feedback: TV Monologue Psychotherapy,” *Radical Software* 1, no. 4 (1971): 11; Milton

Berger, "Multiple Image Self Confrontation," *Radical Software* 2, no. 4 (1972): 8–12; Milton Berger, ed., *Videotape Techniques in Psychiatric Training and Treatment* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1970).

69. Ryan, "Self-Processing," 15.

70. For more on Ryan's later projects see his *Cybernetics of the Sacred* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1974).

71. "Talk Out," *Radical Software* 2, no. 4 (1972): 49.

72. The exhibition ran from May 19 to June 18, 1973. Gillette's earlier work, *Amps, Watts and Volts*, bridged *Wipe Cycle* and the work shown at the Everson Museum. It was included in another significant early video art exhibition, *Vision and Television*, held at Brandeis University's Rose Museum in Waltham, Massachusetts, from January 21 to February 22, 1970. *Vision and Television* (Waltham, MA: Rose Art Museum, 1970).

73. James Harithas, "Blueprint for a Creative Reorientation," in Judson Rosenbush, ed., *Frank Gillette—Video: "Process and Meta-Process"* (Syracuse, NY: Everson Museum of Art, 1973), 6. See also Frank Gillette, *Between Paradigms: The Mood and Its Purpose* (New York: Gordon & Breach, 1973).

74. Rosenbush, ed., *Frank Gillette: Video—Process and Meta-Process*, 8.

75. Yalkut, "Electronic Zen."

76. *Cybernetic Serendipity* was originally held at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, from August 1 to October 20, 1968. It was exhibited at the Corcoran Gallery from July 16 to August 31, 1969. Jasia Reichardt, ed., *Cybernetic Serendipity: The Computer and the Arts* (New York: Praeger, 1968).

77. Downey was also a close friend of Les Levine's. Levine held a wake for Downey in his loft when he died in 1993. *Juan Downey: The Invisible Architect* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 123, 144.

78. *Radical Software* 2, no. 5 (1973).

79. Juan Downey, "Technology and Beyond," *Radical Software* 2, no. 5 (1973): 2.

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid., 3.

83. "Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative: Under the Same Sun," http://media.guggenheim.org/content/foundation/MAP/pdf/MAP_UTSS_Symposium4_transcript_022415.pdf.

84. Juan Downey, "Video Trans America," *Radical Software* 2, no. 5 (1973): 4.

85. *Juan Downey: El Ojo Pensante* (Santiago, Chile: Sala de Arte Fundación Telefónica, 2010), 106. See also Grace Glueck, "Art People," *New York Times*, September 24, 1976.

86. Glueck, "Art People," 68.

87. The conference, which followed in the footsteps of Open Circuits, was titled "Video and the Museum" and was held from April 4 to 7, 1974.
88. <http://davidsonfiles.org/Exhibitions.html>.
89. Glueck, "Art People," 68; Manuela Carneiro da Cunha and Helena Vilata, "Yanomami, Let's Talk," *Afterall*, no. 37 (2014): 28–37; Amalia Cordova, "Aftereffects: Mapping the Experimental Ethnography of Juan Downey in *The Invisible Architect*," *Brooklyn Rail*, June 4, 2012.
90. Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis* (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1942), xi.
91. They also edited their films to create additional works complementing the findings of the book.
92. Bateson and Mead, *Balinese Character*, 53.
93. Gregory Bateson, *A Sacred Unity: Further Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 71.
94. See John W. Bennett, "Applied and Action Anthropology," *Current Anthropology* 36, no. 1, supplement (1996): S23–S53.
95. Downey made two earlier single-channel documentary videos, *Guahibos* (1976) and *The Abandoned Shabono* (1978), whose themes directly relate to *The Laughing Alligator*. For the role of ethnographic film in relation to all three, see Hjorliefur Jonsson, "Cracking Up an Alligator: Ethnography, Juan Downey's Videos and Irony," *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas* 6, no. 1 (2012): 61–86.
96. E.g., Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (New York: William Morrow, 1961).
97. Juan Downey: *El Ojo Pensante*, 206.
98. Numerous essays discuss this work in Corot and Schneider, eds., *Video Art: An Anthology*.
99. Graham's mother had been Lewin's student. See Bennett Simpson, ed., *Dan Graham: Beyond* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 277; Kate Linker, *Vito Acconci* (New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 30–34.
100. Dan Graham, "Eisenhower and the Hippies," *o to 9*, July 1969, 30–37.
101. The musician Thurston Moore recounted in a recent interview with Graham, "I remember I was rehearsing at Acconci's studio in Brooklyn and the first time I met you was when you were there one afternoon, sitting at the table with Vito, and you were both discussing punk rock and No Wave records. I was kind of fascinated that these two artists were having a really heavy discussion on Gang of Four." "Dan Graham and Thurston Moore: The Conceptual Artist and the Sonic Youth Rocker in Conversation," <http://www.timeout.com/newyork/things-to-do/dan-graham-and-thurston-moore>.
102. The book was slated to be commercially published in conjunction with the exhibition *Ecological Art*, held at the John Gibson Gallery in New York City from May

17 to June 28, 1969. It was never commercially published, however, and Graham self-published it in *End Moments* (New York: Dan Graham, 1969).

103. Dan Graham, "Subject Matter," in Brian Wallis, ed., *Rock My Religion: Writings and Art Projects, 1965–1990* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 40.

104. Dan Graham, Untitled biographical statement, *Aspen* 8 (1970–1971): n.p.

105. Graham's performance took place on December 14, 1970.

106. Graham sent an image of himself performing this piece to *Radical Software*, where it was published in the "Access Index" section of the Summer 1971 issue. He also wrote a prospectus for an anthology on video art entitled *Video Cyberspace*, a remarkably early use of the term.

107. Vito Acconci, *Diary of a Body: 1969–1973* (New York: Charta, 2006), 245.

108. He was not, as Rosalind Krauss describes in "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," looking at himself, but rather at the center of the camera lens. As Anne Wagner has recently written in response to Krauss, Acconci's point is a rhetorical apostrophe, summoning both the absent viewer for Acconci and the absent artist for the viewer. He points not at himself but at the viewer, and so at the limits of televised presence. Krauss, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," 51–64; Wagner, "Performance, Video and the Rhetoric of Presence," 59–80.

109. The anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski used the term "phatic communication" to describe phrases such as "hello" and "well, here we are" whose purpose is to open and maintain conversation. Bronislaw Malinowski, "The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages," in C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, eds., *The Meaning of Meaning* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1923), 296–336.

110. Acconci's performance took place in January 1971.

111. Acconci made both *Pryings* and *Claim*, discussed later in this chapter, into single-channel videotapes, which is how they are commonly viewed today.

112. For further discussion of gender and performance art in the 1970s, including Acconci's work, see Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

113. For more on the role of violence and spectatorship in the art of the 1960s and 1970s, see Frazer Ward, *No Innocent Bystanders: Performance Art and Audience* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England / Dartmouth College Press, 2012).

114. It took place on September 10, 1971.

115. Moira Roth, "An Interview with Vito Acconci," Acconci Archives, New York.

116. Margaret Mead, *Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World* (New York: Mentor Books, 1955).

117. *Two Consciousness Projection(s)* was originally performed on January 21, 1972, at 98 Green Street Loft, New York City.

118. Dan Graham, *Video-Architecture-Television*, 4.

119. Ibid.
120. Simon Field, "Dan Graham: An Interview with Simon Field," *Art and Artists*, January 1973, 21.
121. See Graham, *Video-Architecture-Television*.
122. Friedrich Wolfram Heubach, "The Observed Eye, or Making Seeing Visible (On the Video Works of Dan Graham)," in Gloria Moure, ed., *Dan Graham* (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 1998), 193.
123. Graham made these comments with regard to the work of Sol LeWitt, but they apply equally well to his own work. Graham, *End Moments*, 66.
124. Shamberg and Raindance Corporation, *Guerrilla Television*, II: 75.
125. For more on public access cable, see Ralph Engelman, "The Origins of Public Access Cable Television," *Journalism Monographs*, no. 123 (1990); W. D. Sherman Olson, "The History of Public Access Television," <http://billolsonvideo.com/history-public-access-TV.html>; Roselee Goldberg, "Video Art and Cable TV in New York," *Studio International*, May–June 1976, 239.
126. Graham, *Video-Architecture-Television*, 3.
127. Graham made this piece in dialog with Michael Asher. See *Video-Architecture-Television*, 55–56.
128. Telethon consisted of Billy Adler, John Margolies, Van Schley, and Ilene Segalove. They edited the special issue "The TV Environment," *Radical Software* 2, no. 2 (1972). John Hanhardt, "Video/Television Space," in Corot and Schneider, eds., *Video Art: An Anthology*, 221–222.
129. Graham and Birnbaum wrote a proposal for *Local Television* in 1978, but it wasn't broadcast until 1980 in Toronto as part of the cable access program *Television by Artists*. It aired on June 11 and 13. Birnbaum's work was crucial in the transition of video art from its early phase to postmodernism. See T. J. Demos, *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman* (London: Afterall Books, 2010); Dara Birnbaum, *Rough Edits: Popular Image Video* (Halifax: Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1987).
130. Graham, *Video-Architecture-Television*, 60.
131. Ibid., 77.
132. *Changing Channels: Art and Television, 1963–1987* (Vienna: Museum Moderner Kunst, Stiftung Ludwig, 2010), 177.
133. Graham, *Video-Architecture-Television*, 61.
134. Ibid.
135. Downey, "Technology and Beyond," 2.
136. Pieces along these lines include Downey, *The Looking Glass* (1981); Graham, *Rock, My Religion* (1983–87); and Birnbaum, *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman* (1978–79). See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

CODA THE APOTHEOSIS OF VIDEO ART

1. Enzensberger, "Television and the Politics of Liberation," 258.
2. Bill Horrigan, "A Backwards Glance: Video in the 1980s," in Helen Molesworth, ed., *This Will Have Been: Art, Love and Politics in the 1980s* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 401. See also Noah Horowitz, *Art of the Deal: Contemporary Art in a Global Financial Market* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).
3. It also garnered favor in the art world during the 1990s with the rise of new media art and the broader return of interest in art and technology.
4. On the rise of computer graphics and the transition in the movie industry from analog to digital projection, see David Bordwell, *Pandora's Digital Box: Films, Files and the Future of Movies* (Madison, WI: Irvington Way Institute Press, 2012).
5. It traveled to the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, the Houston Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Miami Art Museum.
6. Daniel Soutif, "Pick to Click," *Artforum International*, September 2001, 160.
7. Benjamin Buchloh, "Control, by Design," *Artforum International*, September 2001, 163.
8. Mark Nash, "Reality in the Age of Aesthetics," *Frieze*, April 2008, http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/reality_in_the_age_of_aesthetics/.
9. Viola's series is called *The Passions*. Carol Vogel, "Inside Art," *New York Times*, July 27, 2001; Bill Viola, *The Passions* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003).
10. Anna Rohleder, "Connoisseur's Guide: Collecting Video Art," *forbes.com*, www.forbes.com/2001/10/31/1031conn.html.
11. The exhibition ran from November 19, 2008, to February 2, 2009.
12. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 238–241; Howard Eiland, "Reception in Distraction," *boundary 2* 30, no. 1 (2003): 51–66.

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